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MORE KINDRED OF THE WILD

"Huddled together at the back of the den they were whimpering softly to themselves." (Page 52.)

MORE KINDRED OF THE WILD

By

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

Author of "The Backwoodsmen," "Kings in Exile" "Neighbours Unknown," etc

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The Tiger of the Sea

THROUGH the broad, indolent, green-purple swells, ruffled and crisped along their tops by a mild breeze, the cow orca went wallowing contentedly, her calf swimming close at her side. From time to time it rubbed against her, as if apprehensive in face of the vast and perilous spaces of the ocean, and seeking covert behind her short powerful flipper. And from time to time, being one of the most devoted and assiduous of all the mothers of the wild, she would gather it caressingly to her side with that great flipper, or, whirling half around, touch it inquiringly with her enormous rounded snout.

She was a good nineteen or twenty feet in length, the great orca—or "killer whale," as she would have been dubbed by any sailor or fisherman who might have chanced to cast eyes upon her. She would have been recognized at once, from all the other members of

her whale-and-porpoise tribe, by the immense dorsal fin, not far from five feet high, rising erect from the broad and massive black curve of her back, by the two conspicuous white streaks on her black flank, and by the sharply defined line of her cream-white belly as she rolled lazily on the slope of a swell. All these were danger signals, which the knowing would have taken care to heed.

Little cause for apprehension had the calf of the orca, as long as it kept near its mother. For this most swift and savage of all the cetaceans feared nothing that swam, except her giant cousin, the cachalot, or sperm-whale. Though but twenty feet long, she would attack and kill, through the sheer ferocity of her fury, the great whalebone or "right" whale, of fully four times her length and many times her bulk. Man she might have feared, had she ever learned his power; but, being poor in blubber, her tribe had never tempted man to so difficult and perilous a hunting. There were sharks, to be sure, that might equal or surpass her in size, but none even to approach her in savagery, speed, or cunning. It was in care-free content, therefore, that she lazed onward through the bland, untroubled

sea, heedless alike of the surf on the yellow cliffs to her right, and of the empty spaces of ocean to her left. Such attention as she could spare from the baby charms of her calf was given to searching the transparent deeps below her, where lurked the big squid and sluggish, bottom-feeding fish on which she habitually preyed.

Suddenly, with no sound but a vast sucking gurgle as the waters closed above her, she dived. Far down in the obscurity she had caught sight of a pallid, sprawling form. It was an octopus, which had been so ill-advised as to leave its customary home among the rocks of the bottom and seek new feeding-grounds. Before it had time even to attempt escape, the great jaws of the " killer " engulfed it. For one moment its eight long tentacles writhed desperately, clutching at its captor's lips. Then they vanished, sucked in and swallowed at a gulp. Thereupon the orca sailed leisurely back to the sunlit surface, met on her way up by her anxious calf, which had not been quite quick enough to follow its mother's lightning descent. She had not been two minutes absent, and never for an instant out of sight, but the youngster's in-

stinct warned it well that the mild blue element in which it dwelt was full of dangers.

The octopus, though a large one, had been but a mouthful for the great killer, a stimulus, merely, to her vast appetite. She journeyed now with a keener eye upon the depths. Presently the deep blue-green of the water began to change to a lighter, beryl hue, where a line of making reef came up to within some thirty feet of the surface, and caught the sun. Here, basking, lay a broad, flat, bat-like creature, with wing-fins a dozen feet across, and a long whip-like tail. Its cold moveless eyes, staring upward, caught sight of the killer's body, slowly cleaving the surface. With an almost imperceptible movement of the black wings, it slid from the reef and plunged for refuge in the depths.

But the giant ray had not been quick or stealthy enough to evade its enemy's eye. Again the orca dived, this time without heed of silence, and so swiftly that her broad flukes, rising straight into the air, came down upon the water with a report that resounded all the way in to shore. Her descent was straight as a plummet. The ray, seeing it, was seized with panic. It darted to one side, and shot up-

"There was no fight . . . only a moment's blind, frantic struggle in the foaming swirls."

ward again, at a terrific pace, on a magnificent sweeping curve. With the force of that uprush it hurled its whole black, shuddering bulk clear into the air, where it turned, and for one instant hung flopping darkly, as if the very madness of its terror had driven it to the conquest of a new element. To the nervous calf it was a prodigy of horror, blotting out the sun. But this violent excursion into the air was of only a second or two's duration, and futile as it was brief. As the flat black wings came down again, with an enormous splash, the pursuing orca arose almost beneath them, seized them, and dragged them under. There was no fight, the ray being powerless against its mighty adversary—only a moment's blind, frantic struggle in the foaming swirls, and then a spreading stain of red on the green sea.

This, now, was a fully sufficing meal, even for such an appetite as the orca's ; and many neglected fragments of it went spreading and sinking away to feed the innumerable scavenging crabs that lurked in the weeds and hollows of the sunken reef. The orca, for the next half-hour or so, remained where she was, rolling contentedly in the bright water above

the reef, nursing and caressing her calf, and digesting her meal. Then she slowly continued her journey, but slanting in toward shore till she was not more than half a mile from the chain of precipitous islets and broken promontories which fringed this dangerous coast.

It was now full noon, and the unclouded sunlight, striking almost straight downward upon the surface of the sea, revealed the bottom at an amazing depth. Poised about half way down the glimmering transparency, a large squid, or cuttle-fish, was swimming at leisure. His narrow, tapering body was about six feet in length, and perhaps twelve or fourteen inches in diameter at the broadest part, which was the head. From this formless head, seeming to sprout from it as leaf-stalks from a carrot, grew a bunch of tentacles, ten in number, and of about the same length as the body. Body and tentacles alike were of a pallid, dirty yellow-grey, with brownish spots—a colour that made its wearer almost invisible in that sun-penetrated sea. The progress of the squid was backwards ; and he achieved it, not by moving his tentacles, but by sucking a volume of water into a great

muscular sac beneath the tentacles and forcibly expelling it again. It looked as if he were breathing water and using it to blow himself along.

The orca was by no means hungry so soon after the feast which she had made on the giant ray, but the succulent morsel of the squid was a temptation not to be resisted. Tipping smoothly, her huge but finely-modelled black-and-white form shot straight downward through the shimmering flood. But before she could reach him, the squid looked up and saw her. On the instant his ten loose tentacles tightened to a rigid bundle which offered no obstruction to his progress; his pale sides contracted with a mighty convulsion, expelling a volume of water which shot him along with the speed of a torpedo from its tube; and at the same time, from a gland within the propulsion sac, he squirted forth a jet of inky fluid, which spread at once into a great cloud of black, veiling his flight. Behind that concealment he changed his direction, and fled downward toward a deep crevice in the rocky bottom, where he knew that the jaws of his enemy would not be able to reach him.

The orca, undeterred, plunged straight onward into the inky cloud. But once well within that gloom she lost all track of her intended prey. She also, for the moment, lost herself. This way and that she darted, snapping her vast jaws ravenously, but in vain. They closed on nothing but the empty and tainted water. At last, and quite unexpectedly, she emerged from the blackness into the transparent green, and, glancing upward, saw a sight which caused her to hurl herself madly to the surface with a titanic sweep of her great flanks. That furious stroke made the depths boil like the thrust of a liner's propellers.

The calf, having started to follow its mother into the depths, had been frightened by that inky cloud into which it had seen her vanish. Returning in a flurry to the surface, it was swimming around aimlessly and anxiously, when it caught the eye of a wandering shark.

The shark, knowing very well what it was, looked around for the mother. He had no desire to be uncivil to a mother orca; but there was no mother in sight. He did not understand it; but he was ragingly hungry, and such an opportunity was quite irresistible. He rose at the calf with a rush, and turned

over on his side, exposing his livid-white belly, to seize the prize. The calf, appalled at the dark, triangular, many-toothed cavern which gaped so suddenly before him, writhed away just in time, and began swimming in a big circle around the spot where its mother had dived.

Again the shark rushed; but he had to turn on his side to bring his curious under-set jaws into play, and the calf of the orca had already the nimbleness of its tribe. Again the attack failed. Before he could repeat it, he caught sight of the mother shooting up from the green depths. Though he was some twenty-five feet in length—a good five feet longer than the orca—he turned and fled for his life.

One glance assured the mother that her little one was unhurt. Then she darted after the aggressor at a pace which made his flight quite futile. He had not gone fifty yards when she was upon him, open-jawed. Hurling himself convulsively aside, he just succeeded in evading that first resistless charge. With the courage of desperation he twisted himself about, turned half over, glided beneath his adversary's belly, and caught at her with his

triangular jaws. But she had already swerved, and he failed to get a fair hold. He did, indeed, rend out a mass of hide and blubber, but he reached no vital point, and the raging killer hardly felt the wound. Whirling with a violence that sent the foam and spray spurting into the air, she caught the base of the shark's tail between her immense jaws.

As far as anything like a fight was concerned, this was the end of it. For several minutes the gigantic struggle went on, dashing the discoloured water yards high ; but it was all on one side, as the orca shook and crushed and tore the life out of her beaten opponent. At last she drew off, leaving a mangled mass to sink slowly into the depths. Then, having snuggled the excited calf under her fin, and given him to nurse, she swam slowly inland toward the deep channel which here ran between the islands and the shore, where she thought she might find some more of those succulent squid to compensate her for the one which had so inconsiderately evaded her approaches.

The breeze, which up to now had been little but a succession of cat's-paws, now settled into a steady draught, though not strong

enough to do more than darken the surface of the sea to a heavy purple. Running free before it, up along the coast, between the cliffs and the islands, came a small cat-boat, its one sail sparkling white in the clear sunshine.

The tiny craft contained two passengers—the man at the helm, smoking a big briar pipe, and a silky brown retriever curled up at the foot of the mast. It was a stern coast and a dangerous water for such a cockleshell to traverse ; but the man was a good amateur navigator of small craft, and he knew that between the port which he had left, some fifteen miles back down the coast, and the harbour which he was making for, a dozen miles to the north, there were plenty of refuges wherein he could take shelter in case a sudden storm should blow up out of the east. These waters were unfamiliar to him, but he had a good chart ; and this was his special delight—the coasting of unknown shores, with no companionship but that of his faithful and accommodating dog, who always agreed with him as to the most interesting places to visit.

But though Gardner was an expert yachtsman, with an eye wise to all signs of the weather, and an instinct that could feel the

pulse of the wind through tiller or taut sheet, he knew something less of natural history than was desirable for one who made his playground on the peopled seas. His notions of all the whale tribe and their varying characters were based on what he had read of the great timorous whalebone whale, and what he had seen of the merry and harmless porpoise. When, therefore, he caught sight of the arched black back and formidable head of the orca, lazily ploughing the swells, it never occurred to him that now was the time for discretion. Had he been an *habitué* of these waters, he would have turned his prow promptly in another direction, lest the orca should think he wanted to intrude upon her privacy. As it was, however, he sailed nearer, to see what manner of fish or beast it might be, this black-and-white creature that treated his approach with such indifference.

Passing at a distance of eighty or a hundred yards, Gardner was seized with a fool idea. This was a good chance for a shot. The unknown beast would form an interesting trophy. He did not stop to consider what he should do with it if he bagged it. He did not stop to consider that with his light rifle he could not

hope to do more than inflict a painful wound through the layers of blubber which would protect the vitals of this sea-monster. He did not know, either, that a dead whale sinks to the bottom, and that therefore the most successful shot could bring him no reward. It was enough that the instinct to kill something was upon him. He flung a knee over the tiller to keep his course steady, snatched up the rifle, and fired at a spot just behind the orca's big flipper—somewhere about where he judged the heart would lie. As he did so, the dog, realizing that there was some excitement afoot, sprang up, put his forepaws on the gunwale, and barked furiously at the strange black shape there rolling in the swell.

To Gardner's astonishment, the monster itself made no immediate response to the shot, but instantly, just under its flank, there began a wild commotion. Something there fell to threshing the water frantically, and the monster, swinging about, gazed at that something with great and anxious concern. She stroked it with her flipper, as if trying to calm it; and then Gardner saw that it was the young of the monster that he had struck. At this he felt full of remorse. Had he seen the calf, he would

not have fired at either parent or little one. He was not wantonly cruel, but only thoughtless. For a few seconds he stared irresolutely. Then, judging from its actions that the calf had received a mortal wound, he decided that he ought to put it out of its misery. Taking very careful aim, he fired again. The report echoed sharply from the cliff-face of an island not a hundred feet away.

Gardner had made a good shot this time. Before the echoes of the report had died out, the calf lay still, and then very slowly began to sink. There was stillness for a few seconds, broken only by the excited barking of the brown retriever. The orca swam slowly half around the body of her young, and apparently assured herself that it was dead. Then she turned her small eyes upon the boat. It was only for an instant, but in that instant Gardner realized that he had made a hideous mistake. Instinctively he headed the boat for the rocky islet.

As he jammed the tiller over, at the same time hurriedly freeing his sheet, he saw the water boil about the orca's black form. She was a good hundred feet away, but so appalling was her rush that she seemed to be upon

him in the same instant. With a yelp the dog sprang far up into the bow. As the boat was at that moment broadside on to the terrific attack, Gardner kept his seat, and fired another desperate shot full in the face of the oncoming doom. He might as well have fired a pea-shooter.

The gun dropped to his feet. In the same moment it was as if an express train had struck the boat. She was lifted bodily from the water, and all one side crushed in, while Gardner felt himself hurled clean over the boom. As he came down, he heard a yelp from the brown retriever.

In order to escape entanglement in the sail, which slapped sousing over on top of him, Gardner dived, and came up some fifteen feet beyond. To this dive, and to the momentary concealment afforded by the sail, he doubtless owed his life. He was a crack swimmer, and instantly started for the island at sprinting speed, doing the "crawl" stroke, with head most of the time under water. The orca at first did not observe his escape. The unhappy dog, by his barking, had caught her eye, and him she had seized and crushed the instant he was thrown into the water. Then, turning her

fury upon the wreck of the boat, she had torn it and smashed it to kindling wood, seizing it in her huge jaws and shaking it as a terrier shakes a rat. This done, she had turned toward the island, and her deadly eyes had fallen upon the form of the swimming man as he cleft his way shoreward.

Her rush was like the rush of a torpedo; but Gardner was already laying his frantic hands upon the ledge. The ledge—a shelf not a dozen inches in width—was just awash. He felt that it was no refuge. But at about his own height above him was a niche in the rock, whimsically gouged out as if to hold a statue. With desperate agility he flung himself into the tiny retreat, whipping up his legs behind him, and shrinking as flat as possible into the niche. At the same moment he was deluged with foam and spray, as with a dull crash the body of his pursuer struck the rock just below his feet.

Gardner shuddered, and struggled gaspingly to catch back his breath into his labouring lungs. He had swum many races, but never one like that. Turning cautiously, and keeping himself still flattened like a limpet to the back of the niche, he stared down, trembling

lest the avenger should essay another such mad leap, and with better effect.

But the orca did not seem disposed to try it again. The shock of her impact had been terrific, and must have more or less driven the breath from her body. She was now swimming slowly to and fro before the rock, a grim and dreadful gaoler. Gardner looked down into her cold little eyes, and shivered at the intelligent and implacable hate that flamed in them.

When he found himself sufficiently recovered to consider his situation, he was forced to acknowledge it a rather desperate one. Reaching outwards and upwards as far as he could, his hands found no protuberance of the rock by the aid of which he might hope to climb out of his niche and so make his way to the top of the cliff. He had no way of judging how long his vengeful gaoler might remain on duty; but from the magnitude of the wrong he had done her, the business-like method of her patrol, and the effective fury which she had shown in her attack, he had little reason to hope that she would soon tire of her office. In those teeming seas, as he knew, she could find plenty to eat without forsaking her post. But if those

seas were teeming with sea-life, he reflected ruefully that they were at the same time rather barren of ships. The coasting schooners were apt to give that part of the coast a wide berth, owing to its sunken reefs and awkward currents. His island, to be sure, was little more than half a mile from shore—an easy enough swim for him under ordinary circumstances. But, even with his gaoler out of the way, he had no relish for running the gauntlet of the giant sharks which haunted the island channels. Exposed as he was to the full glare of the sun—the rock around him was uncomfortably hot beneath his hands—he wondered how long it would be before heat and thirst would so overcome him that his legs would crumple under his weight, and he would topple forward into the jaws of his waiting foe. On this point, however, he was presently somewhat reassured, as he noted that the sun would very soon pass over the shoulder of the cliff and leave him in the shade. As far as the heat was concerned, he would be fairly secure until the next morning. But then, if the weather should continue fine, how would he endure the long intolerable blaze of the forenoon, before the sun should again go over the cliff? He began to pray for storm

and shrouded skies. But here he stopped himself, realizing his dilemma. If a storm should come, it was likely at that season to come out of the south-east; and in such event the first rising seas would lick him from his perch. He decided hastily that it was best to make his prayer a general one, and hazard no dangerous suggestions to Providence.

Fumbling instinctively in his pocket, he drew forth his soaked and sopping tobacco-pouch and a box of wet matches. The latter included some wax vestas, and he had a dim hope that these, if carefully dried and properly coaxed, might perhaps be induced to light. He spread them out, with the tobacco, on the hot rock between his feet. He had lost his pipe in the catastrophe, but he had letters in his pocket, and with these, when dried, he planned to roll cigarettes. The enterprise gave him something to do, helping him to pass the weary afternoon. But in the end he found that none of the matches would afford him so much as a splutter. Angrily he threw their futile remnants into the sea.

Night fell suddenly, as always in those latitudes, and the moonlight enchanted the long swells to the smoothness of glass. All night the

orca swam backwards and forwards before the rock, till the changeless monotony of her movements began to hypnotize her prisoner, and he turned his eyes to the cliff-face to escape its influence. He was in deadly fear of dropping to sleep in his weariness, and falling out of the niche. His legs were giving way beneath him, and there was not room in the niche for him to sit down, or even to crouch with any comfort. At last, in desperation, he decided to take the risk of letting his legs hang over the edge, where his enemy could reach them if she should dare another of her wild leaps into the air. The moment he seated himself in this position she swam nearer and eyed him with unutterable malignancy. But she did not attempt to repeat her flying rush. It was plain to Gardner that she had no relish for such another violent concussion with the rock.

At last the interminable night wore itself away. The moon had long disappeared over the cliff, when the velvet purple of the sky began to thin and chill, the stars to pale and fade. Then the measureless splendour of an unclouded tropic dawn broke over the sea, and the shining plane of the waters seemed to tilt downward to meet the sun. Gardner gathered

all his weary strength to face the fiery ordeal that he felt to be before him.

The better to fortify himself against it, he took off his light coat, and, by the aid of some pieces of cord which he found in his pockets, he lowered the garment and drenched it well in the sea. The orca darted in to see what he was doing, but he drew up the dripping coat before she could seize it. He felt that this idea was nothing less than an inspiration, for, by keeping his head and body well drenched, he would be able to endure almost any heat, and might at the same time, by absorption, hope to ward off for a time the extreme torments of his thirst.

As the relenting Fates decreed, however, his trial was presently to be ended. Along about nine o'clock in the morning, from somewhere behind the island came throbbing on the still air a harsh, staccato *chug—chug—chug—chug*, which was to Gardner's ears the divinest of melodies. In an instant he had stripped his light shirt over his head and was holding it in eager hands. A moment more, and a powerful forty-foot motor-launch came into view. She was about a hundred and fifty yards away, and making a lot of racket. But Gardner, yelling

widely and flapping his shirt in the air, succeeded in catching her attention. She turned in toward the rock; but in the next instant the noise of the motor stopped, and she swerved off again. The pilot had caught sight of Gardner's gaoler.

There were three men in the launch. One of them hailed the prisoner.

"What's up?" he demanded concisely.

"I shot that brute's calf yesterday," answered Gardner, "and she smashed up my boat and chased me up here on to this rock."

There was silence for a moment on the launch. Then the captain answered—

"Any fellow that's looking for trouble can generally find it by starting in to fool with a 'killer,'" said he.

"I've thought since that I had made a mistake," said Gardner dryly. "But that was yesterday morning, and I'm pretty near all in. Come and take me off."

There was a brief consultation on the launch. The orca, meanwhile, continued her patrol before the rock, as if such things as forty-foot motor-boats were not worth noticing.

"You'll have to hang on a bit longer," shouted the captain, "while we run back to

port and get a whale-gun. We've got a heavy rifle here, but it's not safe to tackle her with that, for, if we didn't fix her first shot, she'd make matchwood of this launch in about ten seconds. We'll be back inside of an hour, so don't fret."

"Thanks!" said Gardner; and, sweeping off in a wide curve, the launch disappeared behind the island.

It seemed to the imprisoned man a terribly long hour, and he had occasion to bless the cool dripping jacket before he again heard the *chug—chug—chug—chug* of the motor-boat clamouring behind his prison. This time, as soon as it came in sight, it bore straight down upon the orca. In its bow, as it slid gracefully dipping over the smooth swell, Gardner remarked a strange gun —a sort of short big-bore rifle on a swivel. The orca now took note of the fact that the launch was heading straight for her. She paused in her tireless patrolling, and eyed it defiantly, hesitating as to whether she should attack it or not.

The launch reversed propellers till her progress came to a stop, while her captain sighted the weapon in her bow. There was a mighty report. The monster flung herself halfway out

of the water, and fell back with a gigantic splash. For a moment she rushed madly around in a half-circle, then crashed headlong into the cliff, gave one violent shudder, and slowly sank to a fringing reef about two fathoms down.

"Have you plenty of water right up to your ledge?" demanded the captain, as the launch drew slowly in.

"Plenty," said Gardner, swinging down stiffly from his niche and standing ready to crawl abroad.

Ishmael of the Hemlocks

AN Ishmael, indeed, his fangs and his claws were against every other dweller of the wilderness, great or small. And every other dweller of the wilderness was against him—the small and weak with an unsleeping terror, and even the powerful with a hate that was not unmixed with dread. The bear himself, serenely scornful of much larger foes, condescended to regard him with a vigilant animosity. Only the giant moose ignored him utterly, and stalked through the forest unconscious of his presence.

Yet this creature that was able to win himself the tribute of so much fear and so much hate, this Ishmael of the hemlocks, was no bigger than a bobcat or a fox. Among the backwoodsmen and the trappers he was known by various names. The most common of these was " the fisher," though why he should be so called was something of a mystery, his prowess as a fisherman being much inferior

even to that of the racoon, and, of course, in no way to be compared with the skill of such experts as the mink or the otter. He was known also as the "black cat," though he was not black, and neither was he a cat. That he should have been so inappropriately named, however, is perhaps not so surprising as it seems at first glance. His personality was not one that lent itself to exact or intimate observation; and such information as men were able to pick up in regard to him was quite apt, in the long run, to prove mistaken.

A member of the great and redoubtable *Mustela* family, this Ishmael of the hemlock glooms had all the lightning agility and ferocious courage of his little cousin, the weasel, together with the merciless craft and much of the astonishing muscular strength of his bulkier kinsman, the hated wolverene, or "Injun devil." Though hardly more than three feet in length, from his sharp, cruel muzzle to the tip of his handsome, bushy tail, by reason of the incredible swiftness and savagery of his attack he was more than a match for the most powerful of foxes, or for any dog of less than twice his size. The few adversaries whom he was forced to recognize as

outclassing him in strength he could generally manage to overreach by craft.

It was in a dark and tangled hemlock wood that Ishmael had his retreat, where the sombre evergreens shut out the sun in winter as in summer, and fallen, decaying trunks made the earth a labyrinth of tortuous runways and unexpected hiding-places. This was his chosen domain, for he climbed like a squirrel, and it was all the same to him whether he travelled on the ground or by way of the swaying tree-tops. But, thanks to his all-too-effective methods of hunting, game was no longer very abundant in the hemlock wood, and he was wont to forage far afield. Running soundlessly as a mink and tirelessly as a wolf, he would cover enormous distances between the evening and the morning red. Being no respecter of bounds, he poached impartially on all preserves, challenging every other marauder of the forest to the contest of either strength or cunning. And all day, amid the sombre green shadows of the hemlocks, he would sleep, curled up like a peaceful tabby, in the heart of a hollow trunk. He was fond of sleep. His tremendous energies required a lot of it. And this was fortunate for the

other forest kindreds, who were thus enabled to go all day freely hither through the hemlock glooms, on their furtive affairs intent, without fear of the dreaded sleeper in his tree. But, when dusk fell, even the nimble wood-mice were shy of the neighbourhood ; and the wild rabbits, who were Ishmael's chief dependence for his daily diet, fled to the more open hardwood ridges for their moonlight revellings. Even that implacable litter killer, the weasel, forbore to hunt in the hemlock wood. For he knew that Ishmael would not only hunt him—perhaps for sheer delight in the difficult chase—but would even devour his rank and stringy flesh, tough as whipcord, which none of the other forest prowlers would touch unless in the extremest pangs of hunger.

On a certain spring evening, when the light of an early-rising moon silvered the hemlock tops even before the last of the sunset had faded from the sky, Ishmael awoke with an unusual appetite. He came gliding forth somewhat hurriedly, and took not his usual time to stretch himself on the long, slanting trunk which led down from his hole. On the previous night he had fed exclusively on rabbit, and rabbit meat has this peculiarity—that.

as the woodsmen say, it does not "stand by one." After ever so hearty a meal of it, one is soon hungry again; so that they who feed on that flesh must feed often, which is, perhaps, a provision of Nature, that the prolific family of the rabbits shall not be allowed to overrun the earth.

As Ishmael emerged upon his ladder, a hollow, booming voice cried suddenly through the tree-tops. It was a dreadful voice, and it sounded very near, though with a vagueness that made it impossible to say just where it came from. Ishmael knew that menacing voice very well; but, paying no heed to it whatever, he ran on down the sloping trunk. The great horned owl, the terror of all the lesser prowlers of the night, had no terrors for him.

But this winged marauder, as it chanced, was a new-comer—a migrant from those partially-settled districts south of the Ottanoonsis Valley, where the fishers, who loathe the habitations and neighbourhood of man, never ranged. He was unacquainted with Ishmael. His wide, pale, staring eyes saw a furry shape glide down the trunk. As the gliding shape came out into a patch of moonlight, he half

closed his downy wings above his back, and swooped upon it soundlessly. Just as he did so, Ishmael looked up with a wide-mouthed snarl. There was something in that snarl so terrible that the great owl realized he had made a mistake. With a violent flap he veered aside. But it was a close thing for him. Ishmael's lithe neck shot out, and his fangs sank into the owl's padded thigh. He got no more, however, than a mouthful of very downy feathers, and the discomfited bird, flapping hastily away from so dangerous a proximity, left him furiously pawing at his mouth to rid himself of the clinging, exasperating fluff.

Reaching the ground, Ishmael ran on in an evil temper. He was not expecting game in that neighbourhood, so he went in haste, travelling in long, noiseless leaps, the very embodiment of force and speed and precision. But in order not to miss any opportunity which the chances of the chase might throw in his way, he went with his nose held high, alert to catch any passing scent.

Emerging from the hemlock glooms, he entered a region of young second growth, where thickets of half-grown fir and spruce

intermingled with patches of birch, poplar, maple, and cherry. Here, on a sudden, a strong scent drew across his nostrils. He stopped as if shot, and stiffened to instant rigidity, half erect, muzzle held high, while his keen nose questioned the air in every direction. The scent was that of a porcupine, and it was so fresh, so insistent, that he knew the prickly rodent must be close at hand. His implacable eyes, sharp and close-set, peered all about him. At last, glancing upwards he caught sight of a dark ball swaying far out on the slender bough of a tall birch tree.

Now the porcupine is a quarry which the rest of the forest hunters are loath to meddle with. His deadly quills, sharp as needles, and so armed with tiny barbs that, once fixed, they will work their way ever inwards inexorably till they reach, perhaps, a vital spot, are a peril which only starvation itself will drive the weasel, the fox, or the lynx to face. But Ishmael had the secret of dealing with porcupines, and he knew that the flesh beneath that dangerous armour was strong and satisfying. He was up the birch tree and out upon the swaying branch before the heavy-witted porcupine had any suspicion of his approach.

Very cautiously now Ishmael crept out along the slender branch, which bent low under the increasing weight. Perhaps wondering why he had suddenly grown so much heavier, the porcupine slowly turned, to climb back to a less precarious support. Before he was much more than half way around, he found himself confronted, at a distance of a few inches, by the silent, deadly face of Ishmael, crouched low on the branch.

Instantly every quill of the porcupine's defences stood erect ; but his position was one so awkward that he could not immediately coil himself up into that ball of needle-points which all his foes so dreaded. Convulsively he strove to get his naked, unprotected face curled down between his paws. But the doom before him struck too quickly. Ishmael's head darted forward, swift and straight as a rattler's, shot in under the threatening frontlet of barbs, and fixed inexorable fangs in the porcupine's nose.

At the same instant, knowing all the possible dangers of the situation, Ishmael began to back briskly up the branch. The porcupine struggled to double upon himself, in order to strike at his enemy with his armed and powerful

tail. He was being dragged along too rudely for that. Digging in his claws and holding back with all his strength, he struggled to resist his captor and to wrench his bleeding muzzle free. But he was jerked forward so savagely that his scant wits all but forsook him.

The evening twilight, mysterious with its mingling of sunset and moonrise, had hitherto been voicelessly still, except for the occasional solemn twanging note of a night-hawk, swooping across the violet dome of sky. Now, however, the peace was broken by a hideous confusion of sounds, suppressed but desperate. Except to one immediately beneath the tree, the struggle was unseen. But the fierce rattling of branches, the breathless, grunting squeaks, the tearing of claws dragged remorselessly from their hold on the bark, were eloquent of tragedy.

Reaching the crotch of the bough, Ishmael braced his lithe hind-quarters securely upon the main trunk, and with a sudden jerk swung the porcupine clean off his feet, dashing him violently against a branch below. Half stunned and wholly bewildered, the wretched victim laid back all his quills as he swung there, and clawed frantically for a footing.

Ishmael allowed him almost to gain one, and then, as he hung thus extended and defenceless, loosed hold upon his nose and caught him by the throat. The victim's struggles at once grew feebler, and in a few moments ceased altogether. When he hung quite limp, Ishmael let go, and the body dropped to the ground. Following it with a rush, lest some other hunter should forestall him, Ishmael carefully turned it over upon its back—knowing that all the under-parts were soft and unprotected—and fell to his meal.

Having eaten all he could, with the confidence of an ever-successful hunter, he left the remnants indifferently for whoever might come by, and betook himself to the high and ample crotch of a neighbouring beech tree. Here he proceeded to make a careful toilet, cleansing his fine fur scrupulously till not a trace of his late sanguinary adventure remained. Then, as wide awake and as keen for the chase as if he had had nothing to eat for hours, he slipped down from the beech tree and raced on through the moon-silvered stillness.

Presently across the stillness came the light babble of running water. As if at the

sound a memory had flashed upon him, he swerved sharply aside, and in a few seconds came out upon a little grassy meadow on the shores of a shallow brook which sang softly over its pebbles. But Ishmael was not thirsty. He paid no heed to the water, but went sniffing about among the herbage, till presently he found what he was looking for. Straightway he fell to rolling himself over and over in it, and biting at it in a sort of ecstasy. What he had found was a bed of catnip, for which herb he had all the semi-delirious passion of the cats themselves.

Having satiated himself with this luxury, Ishmael kept on up the stream, his nose held high, as usual, but the keenness of his scent somewhat blunted, for the moment, by the pungency of the catnip. It was because of this, perhaps, that, on whisking around a huge half-rotten stump, he ran plump into a big black bear which was grubbing for beetles in the rich mould. The bear made a furious pass at him with her gigantic paw, and Ishmael flashed aside just in time to escape being crushed. Startled and enraged, he darted around the stump, and, reappearing suddenly on the other side, snarled venomously and

made as if to spring at the great beast's throat. He was by no means insane, however; and when the bear lunged forward at him with a grunt of hate, he slipped away like a snake into the undergrowth.

Some five minutes later, while creeping swiftly under the branches of a dense fir thicket, he ran full upon something warm and alive, lying huddled up upon the ground. His nose had not warned him—perhaps because the young of the wild creatures seem, at times, to have a protective lack of scent—and his eyes had not warned him, because the motionless little form, both in colour and in outline, seemed to melt into its surroundings. Nevertheless, Ishmael was not taken by surprise. His practised jaws went instantly and unerringly to this new quarry's throat. There was a sharp bleat of agony and terror, a pathetically brief and feeble beating of awkward limbs. Carefully as its anxious mother had hidden it, the baby fawn too soon had met the doom of the wild.

Ishmael liked venison—young venison—even better than porcupine; so, though he was not exactly hungry, he drank the warm blood greedily, and even managed to partake

of a little solid dessert. While thus pleasantly occupied, however, he kept a sharp look-out for the old doe, whose knife-edged hoofs and mother rage would, as he knew, make her dangerous even for him. Suddenly there sounded a brusque swishing and crashing of branches. But it was not the doe that came bursting into the thicket. It was the great black bear. She had followed him up, and now she was come to rob him of his kill.

For a second or two Ishmael went all but blind with fury. He crouched upon his prey, facing the intruder with so malignant a rage that it almost seemed to efface the disparity of their statures. The bear, however, cared nothing for his rage. She lumbered forward and struck swiftly at the small brown beast that was so presumptuous as to withstand her.

The blow, of course, fell on nothing; Ishmael had vanished like a shadow. An instant later the bear felt a piercing pang in the great muscles just above her heel. She wheeled and struck again like lightning. But Ishmael was already gone. He crouched, snarling softly, some dozen feet away, challenging her to pursue.

But the bear, for all her rage, was not to be

lured. The wound she had received was painful enough, to be sure, but it was not grave ; her opponent's jaws were not wide enough to inflict serious damage on her great furry limb. She knew that in nimbleness she was no match for the vicious little antagonist that taunted her. And she was hungry. She had two bright-eyed whimsical cubs in her den beneath the rocky lip of the ridge, and their appetites made a demand upon her breasts which a diet of wood-grubs and wild tubers hardly enabled her to satisfy. The flesh of the fawn was a godsend to her. Mumbling indignantly, she fell to her repast, but she kept the while a wary eye on the foe.

Now, Ishmael, as it chanced, knew all about that den on the ridge and its precious occupants. From a safe distance he had surveyed it, gnashing his teeth with malice, but not quite liking to risk the perilous adventure of invading it. Now, however, his rage blotted out his always scant endowment of caution. Even so, his cunning did not quite desert him. He made a final threatening rush at his great adversary, to make sure of attracting her undivided attention, and then, as if daunted at last by the fury of her counter-attack, he

darted away, not too swiftly, in a direction exactly opposite to that which would lead him to the den. Craftily he kept to the moonlit patches of open, and the old bear's eyes followed him suspiciously till he was lost in the confusion of the shadows.

Satisfied at last that he was well beyond eyeshot, he wheeled in his tracks, made a short *détour*, and sped straight for the crest of the ridge.

The old bear had her den in a little cave with a narrow entrance, just where the tilted strata of slate which formed the extremity of Blue Ridge broke off sharply and over-hung a deep ravine. Up from the ravine, on the windless air, came the light clamour of Blue Ridge Brook, an unconsidered tributary of the turbulent Ottanoonsis. For some fifteen feet along the face of the steep ran a broken ledge, which led to the entrance of the cave. Full upon the entrance shone now the unclouded moonlight, washing whitely across the straight spires of the fir trees in the valley below.

It was obviously a perilous cul-de-sac, with no back door to retreat by, but Ishmael did not hesitate. He knew that the old bear

was far away, down in the thickets on the other side of the ridge, devouring her stolen meal. He glided along the ledge, his dark, lithe shape conspicuous for a moment in the moonlight. Then he slipped into the cave.

The two glossy cubs, about the size of house cats, were beginning to get hungry. Huddled together at the back of the den, they were whimpering softly to themselves, their small, pointed ears cocked to listen for the shuffle of their mother's returning footsteps, their bright, droll little eyes fixed eagerly on the patch of brightness that filled their doorway. Suddenly they saw, not their mother's huge form, which always blotted out the light, but a low, slender shape, which entered with a graceful, leaping bound. They knew at once that it was deadly, that leaping figure, whose eyes fixed theirs with so steady and cruel a glare; and both set up a shrill, whimpering call for help.

But the two cubs were very different in their tempers, as often happens in the case of animals so variable and so highly individualized as the bear. One of the two faced the peril boldly, a baby paw uplifted to strike, and the thin, black edges of his lips curled back

defiantly from his tiny teeth. The other, appalled on the instant by the menace of those approaching eyes, shivered violently and lost all power of motion.

It was this little unfortunate that first caught Ishmael's eye. Darting straight at its throat, he rolled it over on its back and began tearing it savagely. There was the joy of satisfied vengeance in that kill, and Ishmael, for the moment, forgot his cunning.

A few seconds later he was disturbed by a feeble clawing and nipping at his hind-quarters. The other cub, being of the mettle which recks not of odds, had come valiantly to the aid of his little bed-fellow. With dripping jaws and a furious snarl, Ishmael whipped about to rid himself of this ineffectual assailant. But in that same instant his ears caught the sound of a swift padding on the rocks outside. With one lightning bound, as if his body were all steel springs, he reached the mouth of the cave.

But in the same instant the mother bear, breathless with haste, reached it also. Some shock of instinctive fear had shaken her at the very beginning of her feast, and she had not lingered to think about it—she had come.

One huge paw, with a sweeping stroke, met Ishmael full in the face, crushing his head back between his shoulders and pinning him to the rock. Then the other descended like a pile-driver upon his slender loins. Even in his death-throe Ishmael's jaws worked, biting madly and blindly. But in a second or two it was all over. He lay without a quiver, a shapeless mass of blood and fur beneath the avenger's feet.

The old bear drew back and eyed the body for a moment, then she hurried into the den, whimpering with anxiety. The uninjured cub came sprawling forward to meet her. She gave him a hasty lick and sniff, assuring herself that he was not hurt, and then turned to the dead one. Whining, she sniffed at it, and licked it, and turned it over tenderly with her paw. It was, perhaps, a full minute before she could quite make up her mind that it was dead. When she could no longer doubt the truth, she stopped whining. Lifting the limp little body in her jaws, she carried it outside the cave and laid it down lingeringly on a steep slope of rock. As if this were just what she had planned for, it slipped slowly from its place and fell sprawlingly, rolling over and

over, till it lodged and hung in the branches of an aged spruce some fifty feet below.

The mother did not stay to watch it. Turning back abruptly, she threw herself once more upon the carcase of Ishmael, beating it and rending it with her claws till it resembled nothing that had ever roamed the wilds. Being a fastidious feeder in her way—a lover of honey and fruits and delicate meat—she would not condescend to eat this rank and fibrous flesh. When she had fully wreaked her vengeance upon it, she flung it contemptuously far over the ledge, and withdrew into the cave to suckle her remaining little one. As for what remained of Ishmael, it fell to the bottom of the ravine, there to feed some ancient grudge of fox or wild-cat, or, perhaps, more ignominiously, to make long festival for the scavenger beetles and the blow-flies.

The Keepers of the Nest

UP from the south, and from the blue, palm-fringed lagoons, the giant white flock came beating, on wings that drove them through the heights of air at something like a mile and a half a minute. Over the rank, bright, mysterious solitudes and gold-green reek of the everglades the shining wedge of their flight cleft the air unswervingly. In the mighty, throbbing rhythm of that flight, each vast white wing flashed momently like snow against the intense blue, struck by the level rays of a sun not yet an hour above the horizon.

In that high-voyaging flight went fifteen swans, those huge white, clarion-voiced birds so inaptly known as the "whistling swans." They flew in strict array, with usually four in the shorter limb of the wedge, and eleven in the longer one, the wisest and most dominant of the flock, the undisputed leader, flying

at the apex. The first far summons of the northern spring had come to him suddenly, in the blue and gold of the Floridian lagoons, and though he knew that spring was still deep wrapped in ice, howled over by the savage Arctic winds, he had lingered but a day or two before following the call. For a day or two the flock had been greatly excited, swimming this way and that, preening their feathers nervously, and making the yellow shores re-echo with their harshly sonorous cries. It was not an easy matter to tear themselves away from those milk-warm, teeming, green-azure tides ; but at length, in the cool of the dawn, a flock of wild geese had gone musically *honking* overhead, bound for Hudson Bay. This was just the spur that he was needing. As if he had merely been waiting for these, his forerunners, to lead the way, he sprang into the air, with a long trumpeting call and a mighty beating of wings. The flock rose after him, in a snowy, tempestuous confusion of wings and cries. With much jealous wrangling the wedge formed itself as it rose, pounding upwards on a long slant, till at last, having gained a cloudy height, it swept northward on the trail of the geese.

Not far under five feet in length, and with an enormous wing area, these "whistling swans" were the stateliest birds that the North American continent could boast. The whiteness of their plumage, radiantly flawless, save for a spot of yellow on each side of the face, was set off in a formal fashion by jet-black legs and bill. Their full-arched skulls betrayed a high degree of intelligence, and their wild eyes held a sort of aloof defiance.

Swerving rapidly inland, as if to avoid the Atlantic coast, the swans swept toward the Mississippi Valley. From time to time, with tremendous splashings and a noise as of a band of horns and bugles, they would come down from their heights to rest and feed, seeking always, for their halt, the loneliest of lakes or marshy pools. The weight of their great frames, and the fierce energy expended in the terrific speed of their flight, forced them to feed well and often.

From the altitude at which they journeyed the swans looked down on all the other migrant hosts, with the exception, perhaps, of the geese, who flew at about the same level. Above them, in the intense blue, they saw only a majestically wheeling eagle now and

then, or the black, motionless wings of a soaring vulture, or some high-hawking falcon waiting to swoop upon her prey. But of none of these had the swans any fear. The harmless black vultures would not molest a kitten. And neither the eagle nor the swift gerfalcon, or goshawk, most blood-thirsty of his race, would lightly risk a buffet that might hurl him reeling to the earth. The swans, indeed, gave small thought to any possible enemies in their aërial path.

Yet, but for their confidence in their own power and courage, even the giant white swans might have had misgivings as the goshawk came gliding, a beautiful and sinister form, above the line of their flight. Flying as they were at a rate of not much less than a hundred miles an hour, the measured beat of their wings was a visible manifestation of splendid and adequate effort. But the goshawk swiftly overtook them, almost without seeming to hasten the slow sweep of his long, scythe-like pinions. Directly above the leader his wings came to a stop, and he glided motionless, with the wind of his speed hissing in the stiff-set feathers, and his flat, cruel head reaching downward as if he were about

to strike. The longer limb of the wedge shortened a little, as certain of the younger birds at the rear nervously drew in closer to their fellows. But the leader and the other older birds paid no attention to the menace, beyond turning upwards, as they flew, a steady and watchful gaze. A few moments later, and apparently without an effort, the splendid marauder sailed on ahead. Two minutes more, and he had overtaken the journeying geese. Pouncing upon the hindermost, he gripped its outstretched neck with his clutching talons and fairly tore out its throat. But it was too heavy a bird for him to bear up, so, after a moment or two of tremendous flapping, he let it drop. It fell, sprawlingly, turning over several times in the air before it landed with a crash in the top of a dense old cedar. The great hawk, with half-folded wings, dropped after it straight as a stone and caught it again securely in his talons just as it touched the branches. With heavy flappings he guided it to a perch where he could devour it in comfort; and the swans, as they beat their way above the scene, stared down upon it with eyes of grave indifference.

Soon passing beyond the zones of cane-field, pine barren, and cypress swamp, they crossed the harsh and forbidding ridges of the Tennessee Mountains, running the gauntlet of the rifles of the wild mountaineers. In this perilous passage they lost three of their flock; but their leader swept them on without allowing the array to become demoralized. For a few seconds only was there some confusion, as a strong bird near the head of the wedge, having got his death wound, struggled blindly to keep on. A moment more, however, and he went plunging downward; and the line closed up.

And now the skies they traversed were no longer of so palpitating a blue, but more often of a sullen grey or lowering with black and wind-rent clouds. Gusts of icy rain burst over them, and those wanton storms which strive to buffet back the vanguards of the diffident northern spring. The rivers that now rolled swirling beneath them were cold and swollen floods, heavy with silt. The broad plains that stretched to the horizon and beyond began to be mottled uncouthly with patches of grey and shrinking snow. Soon the brown disappeared, and all was snow,

white and interminable, broken only by the blue-black watercourses rolling along their burden of logs and ice, or by dark green, ragged belts of spruce forest. Such scattered cities as passed beneath them they hardly heeded, unless it chanced to be at night, and the city one of importance. Then the wide-flung glare always drew them, and there would be, on the part of the younger birds, a tendency to descend and investigate; but the leader always checked this inexorably, and swung the flock sometimes to a higher level.

Voyaging thus day by day toward ever more and more inhospitable lands and skies, they came at last to those shelterless and incredibly bleak expanses of the Barren Grounds which stretch along the north-west shores of Hudson Bay. In a blinding smother of snow they arrived at a small lake, a few miles inland from the sea, which had been the leader's objective ever since leaving the sun-drenched Floridian lagoons. But he had too far outflown the advance of the sluggish spring, and the little lake was not yet open. After circling above it with loud, disappointed cries, they flew off down the course of the shallow, turbulent stream which came boiling from

under the ice, and alighted amid the muddy and wave-eaten floes which fringed the shores of the bay.

For nearly three weeks the flock held together and kept to the tide-waters. Their refuge was a narrow and shallow bay, its beaches piled with ice-cakes which gave them some shelter from the tearing winds. Here food was abundant, so they were well enough off, though restless and anxious to get about their nesting.

As the wind was off shore, under the lee of the ridged ice-cakes the water was comparatively still. And it was here they slept, rocking softly on the backwash. Here, for the most part, they were safe from all enemies, But one night, as they slept, shadowy, pale shapes on the dimly-shadowed water, there came another pallid shape, moving noiselessly as a smoke, down to the water's edge, and paused among the huddled ice-cakes. Motionless it eyed the sleeping swans. Then, warily withdrawing, it entered the water some fifty yards away, swam out perhaps another fifty yards, and approached the sleepers from the direction of the open sea, the direction from which they least apprehended attack. Swim-

ming so deep in the water that only a sharp, black muzzle appeared above the surface, the prowling shape came suddenly and without warning above the swans. Rearing half its length above the surface, it seized one of the sleepers by the neck and killed it with a single savage shake.

Wide awake on the instant, the flock beat up into the air with wild buglings of consternation, as the great white bear went splashing shoreward with his prize. The flock flew out to sea, mounting to a great height, and circled for nearly an hour in the glimmering twilight before they could recover their composure. Then they came dropping back in silence, every eye alert, and settled once more upon the water a couple of hundred yards from their old sleeping-place. For perhaps another half-hour they floated with heads all erect, searching every ice-cake, every little lapping wave-crest. And thereafter, so long as the flock remained together, when they slept it was always with a sleepless sentinel on guard.

It was nearly a week later when there came a change—a change so sudden that all the forces of the cold were routed in a night.

The spring, so long held back, came with a soft, delicious rush. No more shrieking of winds and roar of waves along the outer ledges, but, instead, bland airs that breathed of soaking moss, and wide, still waters gleaming under a desolate but tranquil sky. Through long, unclouded days the sun poured down lavishly, the snow fled like a lifting mist, and the ice, collapsing with silvery crash and tinkle, fell back into the floods that gave it birth. A wave of green, high, thin, ineffably tender, went washing in a day all across the illimitable wastes of the muskeg. Another day, and the green was starred with flowers.

The flock had scattered at once, flying off in pairs to their secluded nesting-places. The leader and his mate had no great way to go, for their place was already chosen. For several years they had held a tiny islet in the near-by lake, whose shores were a morass which gave them protection from most enemies. Their nest, of course, was invariably swept out of existence by the winter hurricanes, but they had no objection to the task of nest-building.

The islet was no more than a handful of moss and willow scrub caught in a jumble of

"The leader and his mate had no great way to go, for their place was already chosen."

More Kindred of the Wild]

uptilted rock, and it rose but a foot or so above the lake level. The two swans, working together—the splendid male as diligent in the task as his mate—collected dead sticks and brushwood from all around the shores of the lake, dragging it out with their powerful bills from where the storms had driven it into the tangle of the muskeg. They wove its foundations solidly, and reared it to a height of something over two feet, that its precious contents might be safe from any floods.

Almost before the nest was fairly finished, the female began to lay, the ample cup of the nest becoming lined with down as she went on laying. The eggs were big, obscurely-tinted affairs, a good twelve inches in the greater circumference, and with a dull, suède-like surface. She laid the full complement of her kind, which is six, and then began to sit.

In this long and arduous labour the male took no part. But this was not from any lack of sympathy on his part. He was ceaselessly on guard, and devoted in his attentions to his utterly preoccupied mate ; and never did he allow his foraging expeditions to lead him any distance from the nest. When his mate came off to feed, he stayed close beside

the nest, watching over the eggs. And if any inquisitive saddleback or herring gull flew over, peering down greedily at the coveted spheres in the nest, he would lift his wings threateningly and warn them off with a furious and strident hissing.

For a week or two, however, this assiduous guardianship put no great tax on anything but his patience. There was no serious danger in sight. A pair of the great white and grey Arctic hawk-owls, almost as big as eagles and far more savage, were nesting off on the muskeg, perhaps half a mile away. But these fierce marauders were not interested, for the present, in the nest of the swans. They had not the gulls' taste for eggs, and only the direst hunger could have driven them to try conclusions with the mighty wings and bills of the keepers of the nest on the islet. When the young cygnets should come to be hatched out, then might they begin to take an interest in the swans' nest ; but for the present they never came near enough even to elicit a warning from the vigilant guardian.

Besides the hawk-owls, out there on the muskeg were stoats and ermine, a few mink, plenty of the little blue Arctic foxes, and a

few of the larger and far more dangerous red species. But none of these could get to the nest except by swimming, and the swans knew that not one of these prowlers, unless, perhaps, a very daring red fox, would care to approach the islet as long as either one of its keepers was by. There were no wolves to fear, for they not only hated the half-floating edges of the lake, but they had followed the trail of the wandering caribou to some far-distant ranges. To be sure, there was the great grey lynx, seen picking his way stealthily, from time to time, about the drier portions of the muskeg, and sometimes stopping to glare hungrily across the water at the stately white guardian of the nest. But the swans knew that at this time of year—the season of good hunting—even the lynx was not ravenous enough to wet his well-kept fur by swimming out to the islet.

But one day there came gliding over the muskeg, pausing and lurking behind the low bushes, a beautiful, dark-brown, sinister-looking stranger. He was long and low in the body, sinuous as a snake, and with a cruel, pointed head. He made his way down to the edge of the water, and stood looking steadily

across at the brooding mother on her nest.

The watchful sentinel had never before seen a fisher, but he knew at once that this was an enemy, and a dangerous one. Spreading his vast wings, lowering and extending his long neck on a level with the ground, and hissing like an escape-pipe, he stalked around till he had put himself between his mate and those deadly eyes. At the edge of the water he stood poised, a splendid, gleaming, snowy figure; and for several seconds the two so strangely-matched antagonists surveyed each other across some twenty yards of clear water.

The fisher was not just then particularly hungry, but he was, as usual, in the mood for killing. His pause was not because of any hesitation, but simply because he had never seen a swan before, and, like the cunning tactician that he was, he took count of his opponent's points before attacking. Presently he slipped noiselessly into the water and came swimming at great speed toward the islet.

Ordinarily, perhaps, the swan would have chosen to await the attack on his own threshold. But some swift insight warned him now to join battle in that element where he

was most at home. He launched himself smoothly as oil, and his powerful webs drove him gliding over the surface, apparently without effort, at a pace far beyond that of the fisher. But he did not sail direct to meet the foe. Rather it looked to the foe as if he were going to shun the encounter. He swept off on a curve, as if doubtful what to do in such an emergency.

The fisher was almost abreast of him, when he swerved like lightning, and, fairly lifting himself from the water, hurled himself straight at the swimmer's head. The swimmer dived; but, taken by surprise as he was, he was not quick enough to escape a bewildering blow over the right eye from the bird's powerful bill. Blinded for the moment on that side, he was at the same time filled with a very madness of rage. That any mere thing in feathers should dare to withstand him was unbelievable. He rose to the surface again instantly, shooting half his length out of water, and snapping viciously with his long white fangs. But he rose into an incomprehensible turmoil of enormous, battering wings, and lashed foam, and unheard-of hissings, and blinding, rigid white feathers; and it was nothing but a few

feathers that his deadly jaws succeeded in grasping. Baffled and choking, he fell back with his mouthful of feathers ; and as he dived once more, with a view to coming up again at some more convenient and satisfactory point of attack—at, perhaps, a foot below the surface —the back of his neck was clutched by a pair of steel-like mandibles. The swan had darted his long, snaky neck under water, as if to fish for lily roots ; and now, having secured a good grip, he was shaking his enemy as a terrier would shake an old shoe. His neck and bill were excellently fitted to this employment, for lily roots are tough and require a lot of energetic persuasion.

On land, of course, those tactics would have proved promptly fatal to the bird. The fisher, with his lithe strength and swiftness, would have writhed about and fixed his teeth in his adversary's throat, and the fight would have been over. But here, in the water, he could get no leverage whereon to exert his strength. He could do nothing but kick and twist in futile fury. Moreover, not being accustomed to exerting himself under water, he involuntarily opened his mouth, and speedily felt himself choking. In fact, had the

swan but understood the magnitude of his present advantage, he might now have drowned his assailant without further trouble, and rid the wilderness of one of its bloodiest scourges. But the indignant bird, having himself no objection to keeping his head under water several minutes at a time, little guessed that such an experience might be fatal to his enemy. He presently relaxed his terrible grip, and, backing off lightly, waited to greet the foe's reappearance at the surface with a fresh buffeting of those great wing-elbows in which he put his faith.

Ordinarily speaking, the fisher is the last to cry quits or to lose heart under any punishment. But this kind of punishment was something so mysterious, so undreamed of, that it seemed for the moment to change his whole nature. It is more than probable that a good submersion would cool the battle lust even of a rhinoceros. It certainly cooled the fisher's. Though his lungs were bursting and his brain saw sparks, the moment he was freed from that grip on his neck, he had the presence of mind to remain yet a few seconds more under water, while he swam desperately toward his own shore. When at last he was

forced to lift his head above the surface, he was within a few feet of the fringing bushes. But his adversary was there. He was met, as before, by a stupefying whirlwind of wings and blows and terrific sounds. Gulping a fresh lungful of the air he was agonizing for, he dived again, this time as deep as he could, escaping by a miracle a second darting clutch of his vanquisher's bill. Not till he was actually within the screening roots and stems did he come up again, and then it was to worm his way through them unseen till he was a good twenty paces or so from the water's edge. Then he slunk off without pausing to digest the situation—the most dispirited fisher that ever roamed the muskeg. The swan, catching a glimpse of his flight, filled the solitudes with the sonorous trumpetings of his triumph, and swam proudly back to the nest.

As the long five weeks of brooding, for the patient mother on her nest, drew near an end, there came to the Barren Grounds a time of unprecedented drought. The innumerable streams that drained the soaking muskeg ran shallow as they had never run before within the memory of the long-lived swans. Under the long, unshadowed warmth the lake shrank

amazingly ; and at last, to the vexation of the keepers of the nest, their islet ceased to be perfectly an islet. The group of tilted strata which formed it rose so far out of water that a thin-topped ledge was revealed, connecting them with the shore. It was no more than a series of widely-separated and precarious stepping-stones, awash in the smallest ripples, but it was enough to allow a sufficiently nimble wanderer to visit the islet dry-shod. The swans eyed it with growing disquiet.

At last came the day when the patient brooder heard stirrings, and tappings, and thin little cries coming from the six precious eggs beneath her breast. From time to time she would lower her head among them to listen enraptured, or to answer with soft sounds of encouragement in her throat. Her mate drew close to the nest, forgetting to eat, but never forgetting to keep a fiercely watchful eye upon the ledge connecting with the shore.

Soon one of the baby cygnets, having divided the shell into two halves by the ordered strokes of his sharp-tipped bill, thrust up the top portion as if it had been a lid, and sprawled forth all wet against its mother's hot and naked breast. The mother pushed one half

of the shell within the other, that they might take up less room, and then, a little later, threw them out of the nest, lest they should get fitted on over the end of another egg and smother the occupant.

Presently two more eggs hatched almost simultaneously. The ecstatic mother was now half standing in the nest to give the damp sprawlers room. It was at this time that the old grey lynx, prowling down nearer to the water's edge than was his wont, observed the stepping-stones and decided to come over. He had wanted those great white birds for a long time.

Now, the most powerful of swans, under usual circumstances and conditions, is no match for the lynx, but a helpless quarry merely for that fierce and powerful marauder. But often, in defence of their young, the wild creatures develop powers and heroisms undreamed of at other times. At such a period they become utterly reckless of odds; and such a temper may often accomplish the impossible. Moreover, it is one thing to hold a bridge, and another to fight in the open.

There was no uncertainty in the minds of the two swans as to the deadliness of this peril.

They knew all about lynxes. The mother bird stood up among her eggs and young, and stepped delicately from the nest, hissing and beating her wings. Both birds knew better than to attack this foe by water or by land. With screams of hate they rose laboriously into the air.

The lynx had reached the second stepping-stone, a sharp and narrow one, and was balancing himself with the caution of a house cat afraid of wetting her feet, before taking the next leap. Just as he gathered himself to spring, the male swan struck him heavily on the side of the head, almost throwing him from his foothold. His fore-paws, indeed, and his whiskered muzzle went into the water, but his great hind claws, firm based for the spring, maintained their hold on the rock. Spitting harshly in his amazement, he clawed back to his position. But in the next instant he was so ill-advised and over-confident as to rise upon his hind legs, striking at his assailant in the hope of bringing him down. At the very moment when his balance was least secure, the female, utterly reckless, launched her whole buffeting weight against him. Hurling him irresistibly from the ledge, she

fell with him and upon him, driving him deep into the water.

For one bewildering second he clawed at her, ripping off the strong white feathers, and inflicting cruel wounds on breast and thigh. But this was for a moment only. Daunted and choking, he loosed his grip in haste and pawed his way back to the surface. As he scrambled out upon the ledge, both birds were at him again instantly; but he had not an ounce of fight left in him. He was not at all hungry, and he did not like swans, and he wanted to get off to some quiet, sunny place and dry himself. Spitting loudly, head hunched down between his shoulders, ears flat, and stub of a tail pressed tight between his furry buttocks, he fled ignominiously through a pandemonium of wings and beaks and screams. When he was quite beyond their reach, the two swans stretched themselves to their full height, spread their wings as wide as possible, and trumpeted a raucous warning to all trespassers. Then they hurried back to the nest which they knew so well how to guard. The female, apparently unconscious of her wounds, resumed eagerly her brooding, with soft murmurs to the hatching

young ; while the male, as calm as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, or was ever likely to happen, set himself to preening the ruffled snow of his plumage.

In the Year of no Rabbits

IT was the hungry year—for all the flesh-eating kindreds of the northern wilds a year of ceaseless ambush, of strained vigilance, of unprecedentedly savage feud. In this year every truce was broken.

For it was the year of no rabbits. As happens once in a while, mysteriously, the swarming hordes of them had vanished as if wiped out by a pestilence or exiled in a mass, inexorably, by some caprice of the unseen Powers. And so red anarchy in the wild. For the rabbit is your great reconciler, your great keeper of the peace. It is he that keeps life more or less regulated for the fiercely individual and ungovernable hunters and prowlers. For to his inexhaustible fertility, and to the food supply afforded by his myriads, are all their lives attuned. Their wants satisfied by this facile chase, they can afford to save themselves trouble by avoid-

ing each other at times, by respecting, to a certain extent, each other's ranges, and so escaping the risk of dangerous and doubtful encounters. Few of the wild creatures—with the exception of certain males in the mating season—care to fight for fighting's sake, or to join battle, unless in defence of their young, with an antagonist of anything like equal powers. A victory too costly is almost as bad for them as a defeat, for it leaves them weakened, so that they fall a prey to the next foe that chances along.

Under these circumstances, it is not strange that there should be signs, among the greater beasts, of something like a truce where their helpless young are concerned. It is no matter of good will, by any means, but of common prudence merely. For when their young are threatened, even the weak are dangerous, and the strong become implacable in their vengeance. In general, therefore, among equals, the raiding of nurseries is not regarded as good hunting; the peril is too great for the profit.

But when the rabbits were gone, all that was changed. Then any hunting was good hunting.

It is hard to realize that little, palpitating,

bulging-eyed bunny could exert so vast an influence on the economy of the wilderness. But there was none so strong or so haughty as to rest indifferent to his going. Even man himself was touched; for the foxes and the wild-cats drew in about the settlements and harried the hen-roosts and the pastures of the outlying farms. The great herb-eaters—the red deer, the caribou, and the gigantic moose himself—were not exempt from the sudden anarchy; for the moose and the caribou had to guard their young with a vigilance hitherto undreamed of, and the weaker deer soon discovered that enemies whom he had been wont to despise had all at once grown formidable.

Of all the wilderness dwellers, the bears, perhaps, were least affected. They had never taken more than a chance interest in quarry so elusive as the nimble rabbit, and flesh food was never essential to them so long as roots and fruits and fungi, grubs and beetles, ants and honey, were to be found in the forest. And when the craving for flesh was not to be denied, it was big game they hunted—deer, or sheep, or some strayed heifer. But, for all their independence, the bears were forced to

take count of the departure of Master Rabbit. They grew afraid to go far from their dens, lest in their absence some greatly daring lynx or fox or fisher should slip in and kill their cubs.

It was, perhaps, the lynxes, on the other hand, who suffered most. They and the weasels were the most assiduous hunters of the rabbit, and they lacked the weasels' adaptability. They are set in their ways, the lynxes; and though more savage and vastly more formidable than their smaller cousins, the wild-cats, they are at the same time far shyer of man and all his works. Instead of following the foxes and wild-cats into the fringes of the settlements, they stayed where they were, and went hungry or hunted dangerous game.

Near the top of a steep and rocky knoll, at the heart of a cedar swamp, a wise old mother lynx had her lair. The knoll was an upthrust of broken strata, a tangle of cleft rocks and stunted birch and hemlock, and in a narrow-mouthed cave, near the summit, was the lair. Here the savage mother felt that her litter was pretty well hidden. All approaches to the den were narrow and diffi-

cult, and it would be a bold enemy indeed who would dare the perilous entrance unless very sure of getting clear away before the mother's return. She ventured, therefore, as few mothers in that calamitous season could venture, to allow herself some freedom of range. And this was well. For they were lusty and hungry youngsters, those striped, velvety kittens, whose baby whimperings had already something harsh and fierce in them, though they still sprawled blindly in their nest ; and to keep her breasts supplied with milk for their precious demands she had to have good hunting.

Unlike some more fortunate mothers of the wild, she had to care for her family alone. To her ferocious mate she dared not let their hiding-place be known, lest, in some unnatural moment, he should make a meal of them. Ordinarily, except in mating season, they saw little of each other, this wild and sullen pair. But in this season of scarcity they often met for the purpose of hunting down together some game too powerful for either to manage alone. Together, if fortune favoured them, they would perhaps pull down a buck. When they had feasted full, and dragged the carcase into a

thicket for safer hiding, the female would start back in anxious haste for her den. The male would make as if to follow her ; but she would turn upon him in such a blaze of fury that he would jump back, sit up on his great haunches, lick his blood-stained chaps, and gaze at her with an innocence as demure as of any tabby that ever made away with the canary. The prudent mother was not to be deceived. Staring back over her shadowy grey shoulder, she would growl and spit and snarl till she was quite out of sight of that dangerous figure, then she would wheel in her tracks and flash off in quite another direction. And her mate had far too much respect for his hide to attempt to follow her.

One day, as she came racing back home from one of these expeditions—now gliding like a flicker of light, now bounding in great, noiseless leaps—a sudden foreboding smote her. She had been away, perhaps, a little longer than usual. Lengthening herself out, she shot forward and in among the huddled rocks. As she arrived, a whiff of pungent scent smote her nostrils. She saw a streak of ruddy-yellow fur disappearing under a bush. With one lightning spring, she came

down upon that bush. But there was nothing there. She saw a large fox just whisking around the next boulder. For one agonized moment she hesitated, raging to pursue and rip him to shreds with her terrific claws. But the mother pull was too strong. She raced on up to the den and darted in with an anxious whimper of inquiry.

Her kittens were all there, undisturbed, and noiselessly nosing for her teats, as they felt her and smelt her bending over them. But she had no time just then to gratify their wants. She was too much concerned about their enemies. Giving them a hurried lick of reassurance, to their squalling indignation she left them abruptly.

Sniffing carefully outside, she quickly satisfied herself that the fox had only come to within some ten feet or so of the entrance; but that was more than enough for her mother fears. The enemy had been reconnoitring, and he had found the hiding-place of her treasures. He was an enemy whom she dreaded, because of his cunning, so much superior to her own. Beside herself with rage and fear, she searched every nook and crevice of the knoll. But, of course, she found noth-

ing of him except the musky smell which he had left behind him so liberally.

As luck would have it, however, at the foot of the knoll, almost directly beneath the lair itself, she found another intruder. Nosing for roots in the rich earth between the rocks was a black bear. His presence there was quite innocent; his thoughts were far from young lynxes. But to the eyes of the anxious mother he was sniffing his way to the hiding-place of her little ones.

Now, the most powerful of lynxes, of course, is no match for a bear. But a mother's a mother, and that makes all the difference in the world. The bear was attentively turning over the moss and sod, unmindful of danger, when a cyclone of claws and teeth and screeches fell upon his neck. Taken so completely by surprise, he fairly bleated, and gave futile clutches over the shoulder with his massive paws, which would have made short work of his audacious assailant could they have fairly reached her. But they touched nothing save a little elusive fur; and the next moment, seized with panic, he wheeled and fled wildly through the cedars. The lynx clung to him, biting and clawing

till a low branch swept her off. Whereupon, after pausing to free her teeth from the long black hairs which they had been so diligently collecting, she sped back to the den with her feelings somewhat relieved. The bear ran on, his panic gradually giving way to indignation, till at last the latter conquered. Then he turned and began slowly retracing his steps. He would find his insolent assailant and do her up. But when he reached the knoll, he changed his mind once more. After all, was it worth while going out of his way to find her? She seemed to be so elusive. He passed around to the other side of the knoll, and let off his resentment in rending to pieces an old ant-log.

To the bear, though so ignominiously routed by his small antagonist the affair was of no great moment. His hurts were not deep, and they soon were forgotten. But to the mother lynx it was different. Her security was gone. She felt that both the fox and the bear were after her little ones. She no longer dared to hunt at any distance from home; and near home, thanks to her own reputation, it was bad hunting. All she could do was to lie in wait, with infinite

patience, for chickadees and wood-mice; while her hunger grew, and the supply of precious milk in her breasts began to diminish, and the little ones, whose eyes were now just opening, became more and more insistent in their demands.

About three days after the episodes of the fox and the bear, there came to the knoll an immense cow moose, seeking, as the lynx had done, solitude and security. To the other side of the knoll she came, and had no suspicions of the presence of the lynx, who glared down upon her unseen from a bush-screened crevice near the summit. She was black and grim and very formidable-looking, the great moose, and could well have smashed the life out of the giant cat with one stroke of her splayed fore-hoof. So the lynx had no notion of interfering with her. But she was interested in the errand which had brought the dark tree-eater to this retreat, and she licked hopefully her whiskered jaws.

About daybreak, on the soft moss at the foot of the rock, the moose gave birth to a long-legged, shuddering calf. Forgetful at once of all her suffering, she licked the newcomer long and lovingly, till its soft coat was

dry and glossy dark; and at last, along in the warm of the day, it staggered feebly to its feet and made its first effort to nurse. It was grotesquely gaunt, and lank, and big-headed, and loose-jointed, and its sprawling legs were too weak to long support its weight. In two or three minutes it sank down again upon the moss, where it lay staring around with mild, incurious eyes, while its mother gazed upon it in a tender ecstasy. To her it was the one thing of beauty that the whole green forest held.

Suddenly a faint sound, other than that of rustling leaf and twig, caught her vigilant ear. She turned her head sharply. There among the cedar trunks, not a hundred feet away, was the bear, turning over and munching a cluster of bright yellow fungi. A bear! That was the most to be dreaded of all possible enemies. With a harsh cry, a sort of coughing bellow, she rushed at him.

At sight of this black whirlwind sweeping down upon him, the bear was surprised and pained. He was not a very big bear, and she was a very big moose. If capable of reflection—a point on which doctors differ with some acrimony—he perhaps reflected that the

knoll was not a lucky neighbourhood for him—too many mothers and hardly enough mushrooms. In any case, he decided to go away at once. And he acted with such alertness upon this wise decision that he managed to keep a certain distance between his hindquarters and those furiously-pounding hoofs. He felt that he had reason to congratulate himself.

The lynx had been watching from her high crevice when the moose made her mad charge upon the bear. Her pale, round eyes flamed. Soundlessly she dropped from her ambush. There was no cry from the feeble victim. The lynx was too expert and too wary a hunter for that; she wanted no struggle that would attract the mother's attention from the pursuit of the bear. So the unfortunate calf, who had only just opened his eyes upon life, went out of it without knowing what had happened to him. Without an instant's delay, the lynx began dragging the limp but still quivering prey up the rock. Her only chance was to get it speedily beyond the mother's reach.

The lynx was marvellously strong for a beast of her weight, which was not more than

forty odd pounds, and she was desperate with determination. She knew that this prize would keep her from the necessity of leaving the den till her little ones should be past their first helplessness. Nothing should be allowed to snatch it from her. But, for all her furious efforts, so unmanageable was that limp form, with its long, sprawling legs, that her progress up the broken steep was dangerously slow.

Suddenly the moose, realizing that she could not catch the bear, stopped with a wrathful snort. Ploughing up the dank moss with her great outthrust fore-feet, she wheeled about to return to her calf. She started back at a shambling trot, suspecting no evil, and satisfied with herself for having so well routed the enemy. Then she marked that the little one was no longer in his place. She gave one mighty leap forward, her wild eyes sweeping the whole base of the rock, and then, looking upwards, she saw what had befallen.

As that black bulk of vengeance came thundering towards her, the lynx strained desperately to lift her prize beyond its reach. The steep at this point was too abrupt for any moose to climb, but the frantic mother hurled

herself up it so far that her outstretched hoofs struck the rock on either side of the calf's hind-quarters. Daunted for the instant, the lynx let go her hold and shrank away with a snarl. But seeing how far short her assailant had fallen, she sprang forward again and sank her teeth into the victim's throat with confident defiance.

From that wild leap the mother had fallen back violently upon her haunches. Unconscious of the shock, she drew back a few steps and rushed again to the attack. This time she came on less wildly, and the lynx, glaring down upon her over the shoulder of the prey, had no misgivings. But in reality it was now that the wise old moose was most dangerous. Having come triumphant through many seasons, many vicissitudes, she knew how to handle her powers to best advantage, and in that first leap she had seen that her little one was finished past all helping. Revenge was all that she could strive for. As she charged again, she gathered her gaunt legs beneath her at the last of it, and launched herself upwards with a finely-calculated effort. Thoroughly deceived, the lynx clung obstinately to her hold, with ears flattening back in angry

"The lynx let go her hold and shrank away with a snarl."

More Kindred of the Wild

scorn. But this time she had seriously miscalculated. In the next second one of those huge, battering fore-hoofs smote down upon her. It crushed her head right back between her shoulders, and her tense body, suddenly relaxed, slumped forward upon the neck of her victim.

Falling back as before, because it was impossible for her to gain any foothold on that steep, the moose charged once more and repeated her wonderful leap. This time her stroke brought both the bodies tumbling over each other to the ground. The victor, now sober and deliberate in her fury, pawed them carefully apart and proceeded to stamp the carcase of the lynx into the earth. When this was accomplished to her satisfaction, she went and nosed her little one tenderly for several minutes, muttering thickly in her shaggy throat. Then, with drooping head, she stood over it motionless for hours, till the last of the sunset had faded out, and all the forest was in blackness. At last the moon got up white above the tree-tops, and ran pale fingers down the face of the rock till they uncovered the grim scene at its base. The moose, as if suddenly pulling herself together

to accept the inevitable, lifted her great black head, sniffed the night air with wide nostrils, and made off noiselessly through the cedars.

An hour or two later the bear came cautiously prowling up. Unseen himself, he had seen his late enemy go stalking by with an air of no more concern in that part of the forest. Much puzzled, he had come to seek a solution of the mystery. He found the solution entirely to his taste. He grunted contemptuously over the pounded remnants of the lynx, and then, well able to appreciate such a dainty, made a hearty meal of young moose meat. He sat down on his haunches and grumbled happily over his repast, perhaps thinking how favoured were the bears over all the other dwellers of the wilderness. It would have been a sound and true reflection, could he but have made it, and no more than the due of the Power which had been so generous to his kind.

Meanwhile, the baby lynxes in their den, now hungry past all caution and mewing harshly, might have been left to a lingering and piteous death. But Nature is seldom so cruel. Stealing through the black shadows, and darting across the patches of moonlight, came the fox, anxious to see if anything new

had happened at the knoll. Peering from a thicket, he marked the bear at his feast, and soon made out to understand. Stealing about to explore the knoll, he presently caught the cries of the kittens. This was a phenomenon not hard for him to interpret. After a prudent investigation, he crept into the den. There was some spitting, feeble but courageous, and then the cries of loneliness and hunger stopped. The fox was too businesslike to play with and torment his victims, as one of the cat family would do, but killed them at once and made haste to carry them off to his den. Though not without a healthy edge to his own appetite, he thought first of his mate and cubs, to whom he was untiringly devoted.

The knoll being now no longer occupied by the terrible lynx mother, the lesser folk of the forest began cautiously to revisit it, though they made no long stay in that neighbourhood, because they never knew when the den at the summit might attract some dangerous occupant. Before long the bones of those two bodies at the foot of the rock were polished clean and white, and then the place fell deserted except for the chickadees and the woodpeckers.

As the summer drew to a close, and the first glimmers of autumn scarlet began to tip the maples, scattering here and there across the wilderness reappeared a few rabbits. Their enemies being now less numerous, they multiplied with amazing rapidity, as if thinking they had the earth to replenish ; and soon again tall ears and bulging eyes were flickering through the coverts, sensitive, cleft nostrils questioning every air, and fluffy white tails bobbing up out of the gold-brown fern beds. The rabbits did not love the cedar swamp, with its wet moss and black, half-hidden pools, but a few of their more adventurous spirits roamed everywhere.

One fresh October morning, when the birch trees were all gold among the grey rocks of the knoll, a roving buck rabbit came to the foot of it and stumbled upon that bunch of white bones. At first he was much frightened, and with two prodigious leaps took hiding in the nearest thicket. But the bones made no hostile move whatever, and presently be felt somewhat reassured. After he had stared at them for some time, he concluded that they were harmless. With uncomprehending curiosity he hopped all around them, and then

sat up beside them on his haunches, his long ears erect in foolish inquiry. The last thing he could guess was that he and his kind were responsible for that pile of bleaching bones.

Puck o' the Dusk

Bat, bat, come under my hat,
And I will give you a slice of bacon.

SO sings Mother Goose, with that airy irrelevancy, that unblushing disregard of probability, which make her so fascinating a companion to the wise, but so dangerous, so misleading a guide to the ardent young mind in search of facts. There is nothing in the context to show why the lady, unlike all other ladies who have ever lived, should invite the bat to come under her hat, or even be able to contemplate without shrieks the possibility of a bat coming under her hat. It may be but another instance of that wilfulness, that indifference to convention, which she displays in almost all her poems. Or it may be that she wanted to show how much braver she was than all other women. In either case, we may be sure that she never intended the bat to accept her invitation. The inducement which

she offered was one which no bat in the world would give a "tinker's damn" for. And being, for all her eccentricities, a lady of wide and varied knowledge, she doubtless knew that about the last place in the world where any bat would go was under a hat—any hat, no matter how enchanting the face beneath it. Perhaps, after all, she was merely poking a little sly fun at her sisters of the Universal Feminine, for their frantic delusion that a bat would like to get into their hair. Mother Goose knew very well that nothing but superior force, unscrupulously employed, would make a bat entangle himself in any woman's hair, however bewildering.

It was not of hats, or of hair, indeed, that Puck o' the Dusk was thinking, as he zigzagged through the purple twilight under the thick-leaved, overhanging boughs. Gnats, for the moment, were all his thought. The long, still hours of the golden summer day he had slept away very pleasantly, hanging from the edge of a warped board far up in the shadowy peak of the old barn in the meadow. Other brown bats had hung there beside him, suspended, like him, by their long, hooked nails, and demurely sheathed, like him, in the

silken dusky membrane of their folded wings. It was a popular dormitory for the bats, up there in the dim peak, for the edge of that warped board gave a convenient place whereon to attach themselves ; and, consequently, there had been some crowding. From time to time one or another, finding himself squeezed, would wake up and squeak and prod his neighbour with the bony elbow of his wing, and chatter protestingly in a tiny voice—very tiny, but thinly harsh and vibrant, like the winding of a dollar watch. Puck himself, who chanced to hang on the very end of the row, next to the wide crack in the gable which gave exit to the outer air, had more than once been almost crowded from his perch, so that he had had to do rather more than his share of waking up, elbowing, and watch-winding. Once or twice, too, in this unwonted wakefulness, he had been annoyed by the sight of a large rat, prowling along a big beam far beneath him and glaring up at him with cruel, beady eyes. He loathed rats, but, knowing himself securely out of this one's reach, he had not been alarmed. He had folded himself up in his wings and gone to sleep again, even while the enemy was looking at him. So, on the

whole, the day had gone by pleasantly enough. As the afternoon drew on, he had roused himself several times to scramble flutteringly over to the crack in the gable and take a glance out at the weather, till at last, when the sun had fairly sunk behind the low hills on the other side of the stream, he had sidled through the crack and launched himself upon the gold-and-violet dusk. Within ten minutes he had been followed by all the other occupants of the dormitory, and the peak of the old barn was left empty.

He was a strange-looking creature, the little brown bat—a mixture of bird and mouse and goblin, droll, yet sinister—an impish Puck who drowsed away the hours of sun, and awoke at dusk to whimsical and eccentric activities. His insignificant body, covered with a short brown fur of exquisite fineness, was hung between two immense wings of sooty-dark membrane. This membrane, more elastic than the finest rubber, was stretched, like silk over an umbrella frame, upon the enormously developed arm and finger-bones of the fore-limbs. The two wings were joined together at the tail, and connected with the frail hind-legs as far down as the knees, which

seemed to bend in the wrong direction. Between the powerful shoulder-blades was set a curious little shapeless head, with a pug of a nose, whimsically wide and crooked mouth, big flat ears, and tiny, beadlike, impishly-glittering black eyes.

Awkward and grotesque as he was when swinging from his perch or scrambling up the boarding, the moment he launched himself upon the twilight air, Puck o' the Dusk presented a masterly, though still fantastic, figure. With a combined spread and flexibility of wing such as, weight for weight, no bird could match, his evolutions in the air were of a miraculous alertness. Flying at top speed in a straight line, he could drop instantly like a stone, or dart upwards at apparently right angles to his course, as if shot from a catapult. A dizzying and bewildering zigzag seemed to be his natural flight, and he could dodge in a fashion that would put even the sparrowhawk to shame. And this, indeed, was well. For the darting, dancing gnats and other swift insects were Puck's prey, and the pouncing owls his peculiar enemy.

To-night, as he swung along the scented trees by the water, the windless air was full

of insects—gnats, early night-moths, and the first blundering cockchafers. Being hungry, he hawked ravenously at everything he saw. But as the dusk gathered, and the edge passed off his appetite, he grew more fastidious. He would let many dainties, easily to be had, slip from his very lips, and amuse himself by flickering off in quest of the more nearly unattainable. Once, catching sight of a highflying moth far above the tree-tops, silhouetted, to his keen vision, against the pale violet sky, he shot upward swift as thought, snatched the prize from the very beak of a swooping night-jar, and was gone before the disappointed bird could realize who had forestalled her. Again, dropping headlong, he snapped a cockchafer off a bending grass-head, just as it was spreading its wings to fly, to the furious indignation of a shrew which had been stalking the insect, and was on the very point of springing up at it. It is probable that Puck's eyes, to which the twilight was clear as crystal, had marked the prowling shrew in the grass, and that he took a whimsical delight in snatching the prize. Even the darting swifts were sometimes befooled in this way, as an elusive shadow would flicker past them

and the all-but-captured moth mysteriously vanish.

Soon, as the violet light paled from the sky, Puck o' the Dusk deserted his meadow and flew downstream, over field and hedge, to a spacious garden, with lawns and flower-beds, and a wide-verandahed house set in deep trees. Here the bland summer night was drawing forth an intoxication of perfume from the dew-wet roses and stocks, the Japan lilies, and the spicy-breathed carnations; and hither, enticed by the honey scents, the insects of the night came in swarms. Up and down the wide path at the foot of the garden, under the trees by the water-side, a man and a girl were walking, the girl's white dress glimmering softly in the shadows.

In this pleasant spot Puck was joined by another little brown bat, a female, perhaps his mate, assuredly his playmate. He has not yet revealed enough of his intimacies and domestic habits to enable one to speak confidently on this point. For a little while the two seemed to weave leisurely dances in the air, circling around and over and beneath each other, and from time to time swinging apart on long, dizzying tangents, to meet again un-

erringly at some aërial point of rendezvous. The female flew less lightly, less erratically, than Puck himself; and if one could have observed her at close quarters in a good light, one would have seen that, however playful, she was a most faithful and devoted little mother, carrying her two babies with her through all her frivolling. The little ones managed, in some strange way, to cling about her neck, so securely that not her swiftest whirlings, her most breathless swooping swings, ran any risk of dislodging them. But it must have been a lively experience for the infants, who were yet too young to be left at home in the barn, where a prowling mouse might find them.

In the midst of their play, from somewhere out of space, a wide-winged, noiseless shape swept down upon them. Two enormous eyes, perfectly round, fixed, and palely luminous, glared at them, and huge claws, clutching hideously, snatched at them, this way and that, in dreadful silence. Both Puck and the little mother succeeded in escaping the grasping claws, so lightning swift was their evasion, as if, indeed, they had been blown aside like leaves by the owl's attack. Instantly they vanished deep among the branches, and the dis-

appointed owl winnowed onward to seek some quarry less elusive. In a moment or two the bats fluttered forth again. But, though undaunted, they felt the need of caution while the enemy was still in the neighbourhood. So they betook themselves for their play to the lower end of the garden, where the man and the girl were walking, and began circling and dancing about their preoccupied heads. They considered human beings harmless, and quite useful to keep away owls.

Suddenly, to Puck's amazement, the girl gave a tiny shriek, and hurriedly twisted her light silken scarf about her fair head till she looked like a Pitti Madonna.

"Oh," she cried nervously, "there's another of those dreadful bats trying to get into my hair!"

The man laughed softly and drew her to him.

"Silly one," said he, "the bat couldn't be persuaded to get into even *your* hair! He would have the poor taste to consider it most annoying."

"Oh, but he might blunder into it by mistake," persisted the girl, her wide eyes following apprehensively, from the shelter of his arm, the evolutions of the two dancing shadows.

"You know they are almost blind. And when I was a little girl, Nurse told me that if ever a bat got into my hair, I'd have to have it all cut off, because he would be so snarled up in it there would be no such thing as getting him out."

"Nurse knew a tremendous lot of things that weren't so, I should imagine," rejoined the man. "You will save yourself much anxiety, sweet, on summer evenings, if you bear in mind that bats are as far as possible from being blind. They are marvellously keen-sighted, and they never blunder, but fly and dodge with an accuracy far beyond that of any bird. Either of those little chaps fluttering around us now could pick a gnat off the tip of your small, delectable nose without so much as grazing you with his wing."

"Oh!" said the girl in a tone of relief. "But I don't like them, anyhow. I wish they would go away."

"Like all the world, they hasten to gratify your slightest wish!" responded the man, laughing again. For, even at the girl's last words, both Puck and his playmate had swung away and vanished among the tree-tops.

It was not that they understood English, or

had received upon their sensitive nerve centres a telepathic message from the girl's aversion. Not at all. The fact was simply that the little mother had grown tired, from the weight of her babies hanging to her neck, and had flown off to find a safe branch whereon to hide them for a few moments.

High up in the dark top of a pine tree, the cup-like hollow of a forked bough received the two young ones, who, at some injunction from their mother, flattened their tiny forms to the bark and clung fast to its roughness. There could be no danger for them here, thought the little mother. So she left them, to rest her wings for a few minutes in unburdened flight, and to sup again on a few more gnats and moths. Puck had watched her deposit her babies on the branch, and now flew off with her light-heartedly to forage above the flower-beds.

They had not been away for more than five minutes, when the little mother suddenly got it into her head that her babies wanted her. On a swinging upward curve she sped in haste back to the pine-top, and Puck, after a second's hesitation, followed at her tiny heels.

Now, it chanced that a weasel, his cruel eyes

red with rage and lust of blood, was hunting in the pine tree. He had just lost the trail of a squirrel, which he had been pursuing so closely that he had counted it already his. He had fairly imagined his teeth in the poor chatterer's throat, when, by some miracle of the night—and night among the wild kindreds is full of miracles—quarry and trail had disappeared. It was in the pine tree it had happened, and the furious hunter was questing all over the tree for the lost scent, determined that his malignancy should not be baulked. In his search he ran, sinuous and swift as a snake, out along that high branch in one of whose outer forks the little bat had left her babies.

Now, Puck o' the Dusk, in all his short life, had never had a real difference of opinion with anything more formidable than a hawk-moth or a cockchafer. He knew vaguely what an irresistible and terrible monster was that long, dark shape on the branch, yet he did not hesitate. The weasel was astounded to feel a hard wing-tip drawn sharply across his face. With a thin snarl he sprang upward half the length of his body, snapping at his audacious insulter. But his long, white teeth closed on

"With a thin snarl he sprang upward half the length of his body."

More Kindred of the Wild

empty air, and he nearly lost his balance on the branch. As he recovered himself, bursting with fury, he saw behind him, almost within reach, a dark little fluttering shadow apparently sprawling on the branch, like a wounded night-jar. Doubling on himself as lithely as an eel, he darted like a jet of flame upon the insolent little shadow. But even as he did so, it was gone ; and a few feet below the branch he saw Puck o' the Dusk flitting leisurely to and fro. His narrow-set eyes blazed like live coals, and he gnashed his long white fangs at the indignity of having been so flouted by a paltry bat. But while he glared down at his small challenger, the little mother had safely gathered her droll babies to her neck and sailed off with them through the gloom. For the moment, after such an experience, she had had enough of frivolling. She thought only of getting her babies back into their safe cranny in the roof of the barn, where she could nurse them, and lick their silky fur, and clean the dainty membranes of their delicate little wings by passing them carefully between her lips.

Left once more to himself, Puck o' the Dusk, perhaps excited and over-daring from his suc-

cessful adventure with the weasel, promptly fell foul of another novel experience. Close in front of the house he chased a big moth, which was flying with unwonted swiftness. Hard pressed, it flew straight into the darkness of a wide-open window. Puck followed audaciously. He caught the fugitive as it bumped up against the ceiling. In the same instant a maid shut the window. Then, without noticing the intruder, she went out and shut the door.

Puck, thinking to go out as easily as he had come in, flew hard against the pale glimmer of the glass. He was a little dazed, and very much astonished. Again, and yet once again, he tried to penetrate the hard, invisible barrier, but not blindly, or in panic violence, as a bird would have done. He kept his head even in this startling and unprecedented emergency. His keen vision, after the first shock of surprise, differentiated the glass from the airy space beyond, and he coolly gave up essaying the impossible. Then he devoted himself to a minute examination of every hole and corner in the room ; yet so accurate was he in sight and flight alike, that though the room was full of dainty bibelots and fragile knick-knacks,

the beating of his wings disturbed nothing. He went under every piece of furniture, behind every picture, and investigated persistently the screen which closed the fireplace for the summer. In the course of this minute exploration he routed out an unexpected variety of insects, and he was by no means too perturbed to devour all such dainties that fell to his lot.

The night passed in this way, with some anxiety, indeed, but without monotony. When dawn came grey through the window, and the colour began to return to the glowing geranium-beds, then Puck relinquished his vain quest, but not in despair, by any means. Day for him was the time to go to bed. Hanging himself up comfortably in a fold of the heavy *portières* at one end of the room, he went to sleep with as philosophical a composure as if he had been on his board under the peak of the old barn.

A few hours later two housemaids came into the room and fell to cleaning it. In the course of this operation they took down the *portières*. They shook them in a hap-hazard way, preparatory to folding them up. To their consternation, out fell Puck o' the Dusk.

Their screams at the sight of this monster, nearly four inches long, brought in the man who had been walking in the garden with the girl the night before. He was in riding-breeches and gloves. Puck, only half awake, and very angry at having been so rudely disturbed, sat up on the rug with wings half outspread and tiny black eyes sparkling. The expression of his opinions to the housemaids was as vehement as he could make it, and sounded something like the winding of a *very* large and very insufficiently oiled dollar watch.

"Good Heavens, Jane," exclaimed the man, "I thought that you and Grace must have unearthed *at least* a hippopotamus, from the row you're making! Do you think that this poor little bat is going to eat you?"

He stooped to pick Puck up, but the little fellow sputtered at him shrilly, and snapped at him with such defiance that the man was glad of his thick gloves. The maids tittered.

"See there, sir!" said Jane audaciously. "He'd eat us if he could, he's that savage!"

"He certainly is a plucky little devil," said the man, as he lifted him gently in his gloved hands and carried him to the window.

Puck was very wide awake now, and his

watch-winding was shrill with indignation over his imprisonment in the man's hands. At the window the man released him. The glare of full daylight dazzled him, but, shutting his eyes to a hair-like slit, almost invisible, he could make out the landscape quite clearly. In an instant he had launched himself, and in the next he was fluttering among the nearest branches. Keeping as far as possible among the trees, he made for the water's edge, and so along the meadows to the old barn. A minute or two later he was hanging himself up, unruffled, beside his sleeping comrades in the warm brown gloom of the peak.

In the ordinary course of events, Puck would now have settled himself to sleep away the rest of the daylight. But this twenty-four hours was destined to be a crowded time for him. On the narrow, topmost rafter, just a few feet below him, he observed his playmate of the previous evening, the little mother with her two babies. She had deposited them on the smooth surface of the beam, while she herself was occupied with her toilet—a matter which is of as much concern to a bat as it is to the daintiest of cats. With amazing expertness she would scratch herself behind the ears

with the clawed tips of her wing-elbows, and comb the fur on apparently inaccessible portions of her body. Then she would take her wing membranes, first one, then the other, and stretch them, examine them, pass them between her teeth, and lick them, till there could be no question as to their immaculateness.

While she was thus occupied, one of the swallows from the mud nests under the eaves darted hastily up into the peak in pursuit of a big purple bee. The desperate insect, just evading its pursuer in the peak, boomed downwards close over the rafter, almost grazing the baby bats as he passed. The swallow, dashing after him recklessly, more than grazed the little sprawlers. He brushed them so rudely that they were swept clean off the rafter. Untaught as yet to fly, they nevertheless spread instinctively their fragile wings, and fell flutteringly, like two dead oak leaves, to the floor below.

The barn floor, fortunately, was littered thick with the seeds and tips and refuse of last year's hay, so the babies landed softly and were not hurt. But they landed far apart, as two whirling leaves might have done. The

mother, who at the moment of the accident was fairly enveloped in the folds of her wings, disengaged herself frantically and swooped downwards after them. Then Puck, grown enterprising from his late adventures, came zigzagging down in her wake to see if there was anything he could do.

There was, and that instantly. The big rat who lived under the barn floor was just coming out of his hole. He thought he had seen something fall, and though he did not know what it was, he came scuttling forward with high hopes. It might, he thought, be a young swallow dropped or crowded out of its nest, and he liked young swallows, for variety.

Suddenly his attention was distracted by a light blow on his head. It was a bat, which had apparently almost dropped upon his back. He was not angry—quite the contrary—he was immensely interested. He had never eaten a bat, though he had often wanted to ; and here, seemingly, was his chance, for this bat appeared to be hurt or sick. He jumped up at it. He missed it, to be sure, but not by so very much ; and the bat was still fluttering feebly almost within his reach. Again and again he sprang, his long, white teeth snapping

together with a horrid click, but catching nothing, till presently he found himself once more over by the hole in the corner whence he had just emerged. Then, to his disgust, the feebly fluttering shape which had seemed just within his clutch went darting off on strong wings to the roof, while another bat rose whirling from the middle of the floor, with two little ones clinging to her neck.

Baffled and sullen, the rat crept out into the grass to console himself with easy grass-hoppers; while Puck o' the Dusk, swelling with triumph, swung back to his high perch. What with owls and weasels, moths and men and rats, he felt far from his customary drowsiness; so he set himself to a toilet elaborate and minute, as befitted a brown bat of his achievements.

A Harassed Householder

ALTHOUGH he had never had the advantage of reading a bargain sale advertisement, the big fur seal needed no exhortation to come early and avoid the rush. This was his second season as a full-grown bull, the responsible freeholder of a patch of naked rock-ledge on the skirts of an island in Bering Sea.

The preceding season he had been late in coming north ; and so, for all his wrath and his battle prowess, he had fared poorly, as to both location and wives. He had been forced to content himself with a mean and exposed shelf of rock far back from the water, and with a paltry harem of three mild-eyed but more or less dilapidated little mates. These three, captured, after ferocious battles, from two of the neighbouring bulls, had suffered much mishandling in the contest over their submissive charms, and their usually

sleek coats showed a wear and tear that would have daunted the cleverest furrier of the Rue de la Paix.

Remembering, therefore, all the price he had paid for being late, this bull of the fur seals had early grown restless in the purple southern seas, and turned his face northward betimes. Up along the steep and thundering coasts of California and Oregon, through the tremendous Pacific rollers, he swam steadfastly, now darting like a fish, now gliding at terrific speed with a sinuous, oily succession of fine curves, as if making of his whole pliant body a mighty screw to propel him through the water. For the most part, intent upon his journey, he swam at some little distance below the surface, thrusting up his whiskered muzzle from time to time to breathe, and catching as he went, in those teeming seas, fish enough to satisfy even his unsleeping appetite for fish. But every now and then he and his fellow-voyagers—for he had the company of other wise bulls on his northward quest—would stop and spend some precious time in basking or lazy play under the seductive spring sun, as if, for the moment, a wave of oblivion had swept over their brains, and they

had forgotten the urgency of their purpose.

In the main it was a care-free journey, this migration of the advance-guard of the seal. All full-grown bulls, fierce and agile, their bodies, some six feet or more in length, one mass of lithe and corded muscle, they had few enemies to fear even in those dangerous southern waters. No shark could catch them unless through carelessness of their own; and with his superior speed and his marvellous suppleness in dodging, a great bull seal was capable of making things more or less unpleasant for the clumsy shark. He dreaded, however, that lightning-swift and merciless assassin, the sword-fish, flashing up out of the deeps without warning. And he was always keenly on the watch for that black-and-white shape of doom, the dreadful orca, or "killer" whale. The worst enemies of the northward-moving seals, however—those unscrupulous marauders, the poaching pelagic sealers—left him and his fellows severely alone, because his fur, coarse and battle-scarred, was valueless. These rascals were far behind, waiting for the sleek young cows and for the rich-furred two-year-old and three-year-old young bulls—the

" bachelors," as they are called by the hunters of the seal.

But though no pirate poachers approached to harass his journey, before he had passed beyond the long stretch of the British Columbian coast, the big seal got one serious fright. Somewhere off the Queen Charlotte Islands a Canadian Government cutter, little, but busy and keen as a terrier after rats, steamed in among the herd. The big bull dived deep, straight down into the dim green glimmer, terrified by the darting black bulk and the fiercely churning screw, and the rest of the herd scattered in panic. But not before the Canadian commander had had time to satisfy himself that this was but the advance-guard of old bulls, and that he must seek *his* quarry, the poaching sealers, further to the south.

After this, the big seal swerved far to the westward, following the vast sweep of the Alaskan coast. In his growing eagerness, he kept to the very forefront of the vanguard, and so, rounding the tip of Alaska, he passed through the chain of the Aleutian Islands, where they stretch out like stepping-stones toward the neighbour continent, and came into the shallow tides of Bering Sea. Hitherto,

his journey had been singularly uneventful; but just here he ran into an adventure that came near bringing his career to an abrupt, inglorious end.

In the estuary of a bleak Arctic stream he encountered a vast shoal of salmon heading up for the spawning-beds. It was one of those occasions when the most self-contained of seals might be pardoned for a flurry of excitement. The whole herd went wild. It was the Feast of the Salmon. Through the packed, silvery shoal the great, lithe, black, glistening bodies darted hither and thither, killing, in a sort of delirium, many times more than they could devour, till the pallid, murky flood was stained in wide patches to a watery pink. Here and there a narrow black head, fiercely whiskered, and surmounting a long, massive neck of tremendous power, would thrust itself high above the seething waters, gripping a fat, convulsive salmon in its jaws. As if in sheer wantonness of destruction, the shining fish would be bitten clean in two, one mouthful gulped, and the bleeding fragments dropped into the water. Then the riotous fisherman would plunge for a new prey. It was a bad hour for the salmon. Along the nearer shore of the estuary prowled

certain leisurely white bears, who would plunge into the thronged tide, pick out their prizes, and carry them ashore to be devoured at ease. But the hordes of salmon, urged on by an inexorable desire, never swerved or halted, and their numbers were so incalculable that not all the assaults of seal and bear combined seemed to diminish them in the least.

In the exuberance of his play with the salmon, the big seal chanced to trespass on the none too amiable repose of a strange-looking sea-creature which was rolling sluggishly from side to side on the muddy bottom. This beast, of a pale, corpse-like colour, and some twelve feet in length, suggested some past *mésalliance* between a unicorn and a porpoise. From the middle of its huge, blunt snout protruded, to a length of fully six feet, a massive, keenly-pointed, curiously-twisted tusk of hardest ivory. Its cold, little, pig-like eyes regarded indifferently the myriads of the salmon passing above it, because, for the time, its giant appetite was sated with salmon.

The water of the estuary, at this point, was not more than ten or twelve feet deep; and it chanced that the big seal, in one of his reckless plunges, slapped the narwhal rudely

across the snout with his hind flippers. Possibly the narwhal, at that moment, was suffering from incipient indigestion. His temper was certainly light on the trigger. In a sudden fury he darted upwards. The seal, out of the corner of his eye, saw the rise of that pale bulk, though it was almost imperceptible in the turbid water. He writhed aside, doubling upon himself like an eel ; and he was barely in time. That fine lance of ivory missed, indeed, his vitals, but it ploughed a red gash up his side, just behind the fore-flipper.

With the ferocity of his rush, the narwhal shot his tusk and half his body out of the water. The seal, in a rage at the attack, darted at him as he came down, and slashed him savagely across the pig-like eye. Then, realizing, perhaps, that his assailant's armour of blubber was too thick for his teeth to do much with, he glided off and was lost among the salmon while the narwhal sank back heavily to his interrupted digestion on the mud.

It was an almost windless morning, under a pale, low sun, when the big seal came to that particular island of the Pribilov group which he had been holding in his mind's eye all

through the northward journey. The coast—nay, the whole island—was barren and bleak beyond depiction, but the point where the seal floundered ashore and pre-empted his claim had certain advantages which his kind was quick to appreciate. Not half a mile off shore lay another flat island, long and narrow, which served as a breakwater against the heavy seas of the open. Moreover, in the channel between there were always plenty of fish, and the water came deep right up to the lip of the ledge on which he had established himself.

As he landed, he was followed at once, all along the wide curve of the ledge, by the throngs of his fellow-travellers. And instantly the Polar stillness, which had been breathless as death, was shattered with harsh, barking roars and grunting yells as the new arrivals wrangled savagely over their holdings.

Here the big bull made himself immediately at home, his roof the sky, his house walls the four winds, his floor a gently-sloping space of rock that not the maddest Arctic storm would be able to jar. How desirable a holding he had taken up was promptly proved to him. He had not been five minutes in possession before he had to fight for it. Another bull, even

bigger than himself, grizzled about the muzzle, and with the welt of an old wound white across his face, flounced up the ledge and flung himself in fury upon the householder. From the indignant confidence of the attack, it was, perhaps, the previous season's tenant, strong in imagined rights. But, on those wild ledges, no rights hold but those which might can prove. With a roar, the householder elongated and reared aloft his curious, loose-knit frame, and came down upon the intruder with demoralizing force.

The householder had the advantage of position, being the higher on the slope. His hind flippers, broad, short, and powerful, and turned forward, like the hind limbs of a land quadruped, instead of helplessly backward, like those of the eastern seals, gave him a secure base for his attack. He slashed his opponent mercilessly at the first stroke, and bore him back to the very lip of the ledge. The intruder was bulky and powerful, however, and made good his foothold. And here, for some minutes, the battle hung in doubt. The well-matched adversaries roared their angry defiance as they fought, while their nearest neighbours clamoured in sympathy.

Their mighty necks, glistening in the level sunbeams, twisted this way and that, their heads darting almost too swiftly for the eye to follow, as they slashed at each other's throats and parried the deadly strokes with wide-open jaws. At last that superior fire and energy which had enabled the householder to be first of all the herd to arrive began to overmaster his foe's superior weight. The intruder was suffering heavily, and all at once, either losing his nerve for a moment, or weakened by his wounds, he was overbalanced and hurled into the water. Leaning from the ledge, and waving his head sinuously, the householder waited for the battle to be renewed. But the intruder had had enough. For one moment he thrust his head high above the water and eyed his enemy. Then, diving, he swam off in dejection, and took up a place on the exposed outskirts of the settlement.[1]

Within the next four-and-twenty hours the householder had four more battles to fight in order to make good his title to his holding. But none of these later contests were equal to the first in severity. Then, fortunately for his

[1] The settlement of the fur seals on their breeding-grounds is called a "rookery."

"For one moment he thrust his head high above the water and eyed his enemy."

Mary Kimbrel of the Wild

bleeding flanks, life became less strenuous as the rookery settled down.

Nevertheless, though the big seal now got a chance to rest and recover his breath, the price of his repose was eternal vigilance. Late-comers kept arriving, swimming up to the ledge and threatening to challenge his occupancy of the choice location. But, sprawling close to the lip of the rock, his bleeding bulk in plain view, his mighty neck swaying alertly, his big, intelligent eyes agleam with savage watchfulness, he presented so formidable and prepared a front that his would-be challengers usually reconsidered, and swam on to look for an easier venture. If any did try to land, the householder was down upon them before they could gain a footing, and they got away with their gashes as best they might. Then there were his immediate neighbours, two big, aggressive bulls, to guard against. They had secured good locations of their own, but they were always threatening to encroach on the boundaries which he had established for himself. These boundaries were, indeed, perhaps a bit over-ample, but the householder was planning for a large household, to make up for his failure of the previous season. And

with vehement barking and roaring he warned back every attempt at encroachment.

A curious part of the situation was that the ceaselessly-harassed householder had now no time to eat. Had he left his post for a moment, he would have found it occupied on his return, and been compelled to fight a doubtful battle for its recapture. Not a dozen paces from his nose there was plenty to eat—fat fish swarming in the icy, green sea—but he could not go and catch them. In this, to be sure, he was no worse off than his fellows and rivals. Every bull who had secured a decent place had to give all his time and attention to the guarding of it.

It was now about the first of May, and for five or six weeks, through the long, pale glare of the interminable Arctic day, with the low sun swinging around the horizon and hardly more than dipping beneath it, the householder never broke his fast. He hardly dared to sleep, even, lest some audacious young new-comer should steal a march on him. Fortunately, he was fat, from his winter of good feeding and easy living, and the store of firm blubber beneath his hide kept his vital forces well nourished.

About the end of the month began to arrive the sleek and amiable hordes of the "half-bulls" and the "bachelors," too young as yet to mate, or even to aspire to such a responsibility. With them came a host of the little, mild-eyed, yearling cows, playful children of the sea. To all these thronging innocents the old bulls paid no attention whatever. They swarmed ashore on the outskirts of the rookery, pleased with whatever quarters they could get, and passed their heedless hours—when not engrossed with the business of fishing—in gambolling as joyously as a lot of children just let out from school.

And then, at last, in the first week of June, came the long-looked-for event for which all this householding and watching and fighting and fasting were but the preparation—the arrival of the full-grown cows.

They arrived in ever-increasing detachments, crowding upon each other's flippers.

As the cows are full-grown at two years old, and the bulls not till the age of seven, and as the females, moreover, are born in greater numbers than the males, they outnumber the adult bulls by ten or twelve to one. Nevertheless, there was not a bull in the herd but

was quite sure there would never be enough to "go around."

The first two cows to arrive came swimming, one a foot or two behind the other, straight for the ledge of our harassed but triumphant householder, who awaited them with agitated head reaching and darting as far as possible out over the water. The cow of the fur seal is far smaller than her polygamous and domineering lord, soft-eyed and mild-mannered. As the leading swimmer reached the ledge, before she had time to scramble up of her own accord, the householder grabbed her unceremoniously by the scruff of the neck, and helped her ashore with more vigour than tact. That uncompromising grip of his teeth upon her neck must have been painful, but the little cow seemed to take it as evidence of devotion, for she made no complaint. Her sudden spouse, however, took no time to court, or even to admire, his glistening bride. Thrusting her behind him, he wheeled like a flash to extend the same gallant attention to her sister-voyager. But he was too late. His energetic neighbour on the right had forestalled him just in time, and successfully dragged off the unreluctant fair to grace his own hearth.

Roaring with disappointment and jealousy, the householder floundered over his boundary to reclaim what he counted his own. But, as he did so, a backward glance showed his neighbour on the left coming to steal the bride whom he had already secured. For an instant he wavered, in an agony of indecision. But the faithless little cow, making no effort to follow him, seemed shamelessly indifferent to the prospect of a sudden change of lords. So he flounced furiously back to her side, and stood guard above her with gaping jaws ; and the would-be thief, who had already more than once tasted the householder's mettle, had the discretion to back off.

By this time the cows were arriving in such numbers that every big seal had enough to do in capturing those which came within his reach, without trying to rob his neighbours. The householder, alert and untiring, succeeded, during the next forty-eight hours or so, in grabbing and installing no fewer than a score and half of mild-eyed little mates, who huddled meekly on the ledge behind him, and watched admiringly his herculean efforts to add to their number. They were not troubled by jealousy. Most of them, perhaps, were proud to belong to

a well-stocked harem, whose numbers attested the fighting powers of their lord. Two, to be sure, did allow themselves to be lured off—while the householder was busy helping new arrivals ashore—by an improvident young bull in the rear ranks, who had hitherto been unable to secure a mate. But, for the most part, there was a something in the grip of the householder's jaws on their necks which they could not forget. It proved him a masterful lover, and subdued any impulse to stray.

For some days the belated companies of the cows kept straggling in, and the householder, his good fortune in the way of opportunity never failing him, presently found himself at the head of a harem of over forty members. For his great heart and broad ambitions it was none too many, but it made him a centre of bitterest enmity. Even his strenuous neighbours on either side of him had no such company on their ledges, and to the rear was a scattered line of young bulls who had come late, and were ever on the look-out for a chance to poach. The householder was so harassed by his honours that he had no time to snatch a wink of sleep; and as for *eating*, that was an indulgence he had not allowed himself for

so long that he had almost forgotten what it was like. Forty wives—and all waiting to be stolen by any stronger or more crafty suitor who might come along! It was something even for the harassed householder to keep them all counted. He kept floundering vigilantly around the huddled throng; and if any one, feeling herself neglected or overlooked, tried to slip off and join some forlorn-looking suitor in the back row, she speedily found that she was not so much forgotten as she had thought. She would be grabbed by the neck, shaken into abject penitence, and thrust back into the centre of the harem. All this, of course, was not accomplished without continual skirmishes, as this or that disappointed trespasser would take courage to show fight. But the householder was so much too strong and clever a fighter for the inexperienced young bulls of the back line, that such skirmishes were always quickly ended.

Within a few days of the arrival of the cows, the woolly, little, baby-faced "pups" began to be born. As the births increased, the troubles of the householder began to diminish a little. As soon as a pup was born in his harem, the mother was safe not to stray. But

trespassers continued to be as dangerous as ever, for those gallant robbers were no shirkers of responsibility, and were always ready to steal mother and pup together. As soon as the young were over their first abject helplessness, the mothers were permitted to leave the harem, strictly by the front door, in order to catch fish and keep up their supply of milk for the little ones, for the householder knew that no cow would now fail to come back. But for himself there was still neither rest nor food. There was nothing for him to do but stay at home, keep awake, watch the little ones of forty wives, and fight off persistent rivals. It was a wearing existence. He was by this time no longer a sleek and well-fed gallant, but a gaunt hideful of bones adorned with unlovely though honourable scars. All his strength and fire, however, remained to him unimpaired, and no rival challenged him without being made to repent it.

But one day there came an enemy whom even the householder's prowess could not defy. The seal-hunters arrived at the rookery. They were not those indiscriminate slaughterers, the poachers, but the legitimate hunters, who came to kill with discretion. They did not

interfere with the old bulls and their breeding households, though the bulls all roared at them dauntlessly. They invaded the playgrounds of the unmated youth, and, sparing the little females, made awful havoc among the half-bulls and the bachelors, till the once happy playground was hideous with the blood and the dead. Yet they were careful to spare a good percentage of even the unhappy bachelors, in order that the profitable tribe of the fur seals might not be killed out.

Among the seal-hunters came a thoughtful man, whose purpose was not to kill, but to observe. He did not like the killing. His inquiring nose wrinkled with aversion as he eyed the slaughter for a moment to see just how it was done. Then he turned away in some haste to study the rest of the rookery, to shoot at it with his camera, and to find out how the fur seal conducted itself when more interestingly employed than in being killed. Slowly he made his way along behind the rookery, heedless of threats and roars and snapping jaws, and halting at every other step to level his lens and click his shutter. At last, filled with enthusiasm and facts, he came behind the ledge where the war-worn

householder guarded his harem of forty fair.

This immense family and its towering guardian caught the observer's eye. Here, indeed, was a household to be made a note of. First he snapped it from a distance. Then he determined to invade its crowded privacy and study its home arrangements. Avoiding, without much heed, the angry bulls of the rear line, with their meagre harems, he made his way fearlessly right in among the shrinking cows and the round-eyed, trusting pups of the householder's family. He had been seeing so many seals killed, and so easily, that he had acquired a mistaken idea of that creature's courage. Ignoring the harsh warning of the householder, he stooped down to examine and fondle one of the pups, which gazed up at him fearlessly with eyes of pathetic depth and softness.

Now, the householder knew very well what this stranger was—the invincible Man, subjugator of all beasts, able to kill instantly and invisibly or with darting flame. But he had no hesitation ; he took no account of risks in defending his hearth. An awkward but dangerous figure, he came lunging valiantly to the attack.

Just in the nick of time the man looked up, to see the ragged bulk descending upon him. He leapt wildly, dropping his camera, and escaped the fatal slash of his assailant's jaws. But one great flipper struck him, and he fell headlong, half stunned, over the back of a protesting cow. Fortunately for him, the householder paused to crush the camera, and the man, shaking his head in a half-dazed way, had time to recover himself sufficiently to meet the next floundering assault. The only weapon he carried was a heavy knotted stick, which served him both as walking-stick and club. As he sprang aside, he caught his adversary a stiff blow on the nose—the most vulnerable point of a seal—and the householder collapsed like a punctured tyre.

The man looked down with compunction on his fallen foe, picked up the wreck of his camera, patted a pup that would not get out of his way, and withdrew. When he had passed the rear line of bulls, he looked back, and saw, to his infinite satisfaction, that his stroke had been less effective than he had feared. The householder, slowly recovering, was lifting up his dauntless head, scanning his family to see that none were stolen, and once

more, though still somewhat faintly, roaring his defiance to all comers. When, a few days later, the satisfied hunters left the island, the householder could not but feel that he himself had been the cause of their departure. As there was no one to dispute his theory, it is not strange that he found it satisfying.

Some six weeks later, toward the end of July, the pups being by this time strong enough to travel, and the pangs of his prolonged fast having grown unbearable, the householder and all his rivals came suddenly to the conclusion that it was not worth while striving at such cost to hold their harems together. They remembered that next year they might hope to gather others just as interesting. And all at once, their fiercest feuds forgotten, they plumped into the water and began hungrily chasing fish. Presently all turned their faces southward, and soon the bleak ledges were left solitary once more to confront the storm and cold of the oncoming Arctic night.

Mothers of the North

IT was in the first full, ardent rush of the Arctic spring.

Thrilling to the heat of the long, long days of unobstructed sun, beneath the southward-facing walls of the glaciers, the thin soil clothing the eternal ice burst into green and flowering life. In the sunward valleys brooks awoke, with a sudden filming of grass along their borders, a sudden passionate unfolding of starlike blooms, white, yellow, and blue. As if summoned from sleep by the impetuous blossoms, eager to be fertilized, came the small northern butterflies in swarms, with little wasp-like flies and beetles innumerable. Along the inaccessible ledges of the cliffs the auks and gulls, in crowded ranks, screamed and quarrelled over their untidy nests, or filled the air with wings as they flocked out over the grey-green, tranquil sea. The world of the north was trying to forget for a little

the implacable savagery, the deathly cold and dark, of its winter's torment.

The great, unwieldy, grunting walruses felt it, too, and responded to it—this ardour of the lonely Arctic spring, astray in the wastes. On the ledges of a rocky islet, just off shore, the members of a little herd were sunning themselves. There were two old bulls and four cows with their sprawling lumps of calves. All were in a good humour with each other, lying with heads or fore-flippers flung amicably across each other's grotesque bodies, and grunting, groaning, grumbling in various tones of content as the pungent sunlight tickled their coarse hides. All seemed without a care beneath the sky, except one of the old bulls. He, being on watch, held his great tusked and bewhiskered head high above his wallowing fellows, and kept eyes, ears, and nose alert for the approach of any peril. One of the unshapely, helpless-looking calves, with its mother, lay in a hollow of the rock, perhaps twenty feet back from the water's edge—a snug spot, sheltered from all winds of north and east. The rest of the herd were grouped so close to the water's edge that from time to time a

lazy, leaden-green swell would come lipping up and splash them. The cubs had a tendency to flounder away out of reach of these chill douches; but their mothers were very resolute about keeping them close to the water.

Presently the little groups were enlarged by one. Another old bull, who had been foraging at the sea-bottom, grubbing up clams, star-fish, and oysters with his tusks, and crushing them in the massive mill of his grinders, suddenly shot his ferocious-looking head above the surface. For all his gross bulk, in the water he moved with almost the speed and grace of a seal. In a second he was at the rock's edge. Hooking his immense tusks over it, he drew himself up by the force of his mighty neck, flung forward a broad flipper, dragged himself out of the water, and flopped down among his fellows with an explosive grunt of satisfaction.

They were not, it must be confessed, a very attractive company, these uncouth sea-cattle. The adults were from ten to eleven feet in length, round and swollen-looking as hogsheads, quite lacking the adornment of tails, and in colour of a dirty yellow-brown.

Sparse bristles, scattered over their hides in rusty patches, gave them a disreputable, moth-eaten look. Their short but powerful flippers were ludicrously splayed. They had the upper half of the head small, flat-skulled, and earless ; while the lower half, or muzzle, was enormously developed to support the massive, downward-growing tusks, twelve to fifteen inches in length. This grotesque enlargement of the upper jaw was further emphasized by the bristling growth of long stiff whiskers which decorated it, giving the wearer an air of blustering irascibility. As for the calves, their podgy little forms had the same overblown look as those of their parents, but their clean young hides were not so wrinkled, nor were they anywhere disfigured by lumps and scars. They were without tusks, of course, but the huge development of their muzzles, in preparation for the sprouting of the tusks, gave them a truculent air that was ludicrously belied by the mildness of their baby eyes. They rolled and snuggled against the mountainous flanks of their mothers, who watched them with vigilant devotion. The calf that lay furthest inland, apart from the rest, was in some pain, and

whimpering. That morning it had got a nasty prod in the shoulder from the horn of a passing narwhal, and the anxious mother was trying to comfort it, gathering it clumsily but tenderly against her side and coaxing it to nurse. The rest of the herd, for the moment, was utterly content with life; but the troubled mother was too much engrossed with her little one's complaints to notice how caressing was the spring sun.

Meanwhile, not far away was another mother who, in spite of the spring, was equally ill-content. Down to the shore of the mainland, behind the island, came prowling a lean white bear with a cub close at her heels. The narrow bay between island and mainland was full of huge ice-cakes swung in by an eddy of the tides. Many of these wave-eaten and muddied floes were piled up on the shore along tide-mark, and as their worn edges softened under the downpour of the sun, they crumbled and fell with small glassy crashes. Hither and thither among them stole the brave mother, hoping to find some dead fish or other edible drift of the sea. She had had bad hunting of late—the shoals of the salmon had been inexplicably

delaying their appearance on the coast—and she was feeling the pangs of famine. To be sure, she was filling her stomach, after a fashion, with the young shoots of rushes and other green stuff, but this was not the diet which Nature had framed her for. And in her lack of right nourishment she was pouring her very life itself into her breasts, in the effort to feed her little one. He, too, was suffering, so scanty was the supply of mother's milk. Even now, as the great bear stopped to nose a mass of seaweed, the cub crowded under her flank, and began to nurse, whimpering with disappointment at the too thin stream he drew. Her fierce eyes filmed, and she turned her head far round in order to lick him tenderly.

The stranded ice-floes yielded nothing that a bear could eat, and she was ranging on down the shore, disconsolately, when all at once a waft of air drew in from seaward. It came direct from the island, and it brought the scent of walrus. She lifted her long black-edged muzzle and sniffed sharply, then stood as rigid as one of the ice-cakes, and searchingly scrutinized the island. The cub, either imitating his mother or obeying some under-

"She lifted her long black-edged muzzle and sniffed sharply."

More Kindred of the Wild

stood signal, stood moveless also. One of the earliest lessons learned by the youngsters of the wild is to keep still.

There was not a walrus in sight, but the bear's nostrils could not deceive her. She knew the huge sea-beasts were there, on the other side of the island, and she knew they would be very much at ease on such a day as this, basking in the sun. Walruses were not the quarry she would have chosen. The great bulls, courageous and hot-tempered, the powerful cows, dauntless as herself in defence of their young—she knew them for antagonists to be avoided whenever possible. But just now she had no choice. Her cub was not getting food enough. To her there was nothing else in the world so important as that small, troublesome, droll-eyed, hungry cub.

Keeping herself now well out of sight behind the ice-floes, with the cub close at her heels, she stole down to the edge of the retreating tide. The bay was too crowded with slowly-moving floes to be quite as safe for the cub as she would have had it, but she could not leave him behind. She kept him close at her side as she swam. He was a good

swimmer, diving fearlessly when she dived, his little black nose cutting the grey-green water bravely and swiftly. In everything he imitated her stealth, her speed, her vigilance, for he knew there was big game in this hunting.

The island was a ridge of some elevation, shelving down by ledges to the sea. The white bear knew better than to climb the ridge and try to steal down upon the walruses. She was well aware that they would be keenly on the watch against any approach from the landward side. From that direction came all they feared. When she arrived at the island, she swam along, close under shelter of the shore, till she reached the extremity. Then, behind the shelter of a stranded floe, she drew herself out, at the same time flattening herself to the rock till she seemed a part of it. Every movement the cub copied assiduously. But when she rose upon her haunches, and laid her narrow head in a cleft of the ice-floe to peer over, he kept himself in the background and watched her with his head cocked anxiously to one side.

The walruses were in full view, not fifty

yards away. For all the pangs of her hunger, the mother bear never stirred, but remained for long minutes watching them, studying the approaches, while the scent of them came on the light breeze to her nostrils. She saw that the herd itself was inaccessible, being well guarded and close to the water. If she should try to rush them, they would escape at the first alarm; or if she should succeed in catching one of the cubs in the water, she would be overwhelmed in a moment—caught by those mighty tusks, dragged to the bottom, drowned and crushed shapeless. But with gleaming eyes she noted the cow and calf lying further up the slope. Here was her chance—a dangerous one enough, but still a chance. She dropped down at last to all fours, crouched flat, and began worming her way upward among the rocks, making a covert of the smallest hummock or projection. The cub still followed her.

It was miraculous how small the great white beast managed to make herself as she slowly crept up upon her quarry. Her movements were as noiseless as a cat's. They had need to be, indeed, for the hearing of the walrus is keen. There was not a sound upon

the air but the heavy breathings and gruntings of the herd, and the occasional light tinkle and crash of crumbling ice.

At a distance of not more than twenty paces from the prey, the old bear stopped and gave a quick backward glance at her cub. Instantly the latter stopped also, and crouched warily behind a rock. Then his mother crept on alone. She knew that he was quite agile enough to avoid the floundering rush of any walrus, but with him she would take no risks.

Suddenly, as if some premonition of peril had smitten her, the mother walrus lifted her head and stared about her anxiously. There was no danger in sight, but she had grown uneasy. She lowered her head against her calf's plump flank, and started to push him down the slope toward the rest of the herd.

Not a dozen feet away, an enormous form, white and terrible, arose as if by magic out of the bare rocks. A bellow of warning came from the vigilant old bull down below. But in the same instant that white mass fell upon the cringing calf, and smashed its neck before it knew what was happening.

With a roar the mother walrus reared herself and launched her huge bulk straight forward upon the enemy. She was swift in her attack—amazingly so—but the white bear was swifter. With astonishing strength and deftness, even in the moment of delivering that fatal blow, she had pushed the body of her prey aside, several feet up the slope. At the same time, bending her long back like a bow, she succeeded in evading the full force of the mother's assault, which otherwise would have pinned her down and crushed her. She caught, however, upon one haunch, a glancing blow from those descending tusks, which came down like pile-drivers, and a long red mark leapt into view upon her white fur. The next moment she had dragged the prey beyond reach of the frantic mother's next plunging charge.

The rocky slope was now in an uproar. The other cows had instantly rolled their startled young into the sea and were tumbling in after them with terrific splashing. The three bulls, grunting furiously, were floundering in great loose plunges up the slope, eager to get into the fray. The bereaved mother was gasping and snorting with her prodigious

efforts, as she hurled herself in huge sprawling lunges after the slayer of her young. So agile was she proving herself, indeed, that the bear had enough to do in keeping out of her reach, while half lifting, half dragging the prize up the incline.

At last the body of the calf caught in a crevice, and the bear had to pause to wrench it free. It was for a moment only, but that moment came very near being her last. She felt rather than saw the impending mass of the cow as it reared itself above her. Like a spring suddenly loosed, she bounded aside, and those two straight tusks came down, just where she had stood, with the force of a ton of bone and muscle behind them.

Wheeling in a flash to follow up her advantage, the desperate cow reared again. But this time she was caught at a disadvantage. Her far more intelligent adversary had slipped around behind her, and now, as she reared, struck her a tremendous buffet on the side of the neck. Caught off her balance, the cow rolled down the slope, turning clean over before she could recover her footing. The three bulls, in the midst of their floundering charge up the hill, checked themselves for a

moment to see how she had fared. And in that moment the bear succeeded in dragging her prize up a steep where the walruses could not hope to follow. A few yards more, and she had gained a spacious ledge some twenty feet above the raging walruses. A second or two later, in answer to her summons, the cub joined her there, scrambling nimbly over the rocks at a safe distance from the foe.

Realizing now that the marauder had quite escaped their vengeance, the three bulls at length turned away, and went floundering and snorting back to the sea. The mother, however, inconsolable in her rage and grief, kept rearing herself against the face of the rock, clawing at it impotently with her great flippers, and striking it with her tusks till it seemed as if they must give way beneath the blows. Again and again she fell back, only to renew her futile and pathetic efforts the moment she could recover her breath. And from time to time the old bear, nursing the cub, would glance down upon her with placid unconcern. At last, coming in some sort to her senses, the unhappy cow turned away and crawled heavily, with a slow, jerky motion,

down the slope. Slowly, and with a mighty splash, she launched herself into the sea, and swam off to join the rest of the herd a mile out from shore.

When the Colonel came to Gallagher's

THE gang at Gallagher's Camp was a small one—eight "hands" only, besides the boss and the cook.

It was a remote and restricted timber area which they were chopping over—the little valley where the wild Ottanoonsis stream takes its rise in a pond which the lumbermen, inscrutably, have named Two Lakes. On this day, the day before Christmas, there had been grumbling in the camp, which big Tim Gallagher, the good-humoured boss, could not pacify; which even Jimmy Dillihunt, the resourceful cook, could not charm away, with all his eloquent depictions of the plum-pudding he would evolve for them on the morrow, rich with raisins and reeking with hot, spiced sauce.

What the boys wanted was fresh meat. Their souls were sick of the routine of salt pork, salt beef, salt pork. They had counted on goose, and plenty of it, for Christmas.

If not goose, then fresh roast beef, red with juice, and brown gravy so abundant that their potatoes would fatly swim in it.

And now it was going to be pork!

There was apparently no escape from it. Little Pat Nolan voiced the sentiments of the gang when he growled—

"'Tain't me religious scruples 'at makes me hate the pig, but bekase Oi've et 'im till I squeal in me slape!"

The trouble had arisen through no fault of the boss's, nor yet of Jimmy Dillihunt's. An utterly unprecedented snowfall, storm on storm, blizzard upon blizzard, had heaped the long forest trail to such a depth that no fresh supplies could be got in from the far-off settlements. Just when such supplies—those fresh meats and vegetables which guard the health and temper of the lumber camps—might be expected to arrive, no one could foretell.

To make matters worse, the big lake trout which had formerly swarmed in Two Lakes Pond had been cleaned out the previous season by a band of dynamite poachers. And, on the top of all this, the moose and caribou were apparently absorbed in affairs

which kept them somewhere else. For the past four or five days there had been always two of the men off on the anxious hunt for caribou or moose, or for the buried den of some winter-sleeping bear. But they had bagged not so much as one lean rabbit.

This afternoon all hands had knocked off early, the more properly to observe Christmas Eve, and the more comfortably to indulge their righteous growl. Gathered about the glowing stove, or reclining luxuriously in their bunks, they could devote their best wits to nagging the boss, Tim Gallagher ; or to the baiting of busy and bothered Jimmy Dillihunt.

This latter occupation was some relief to their feelings. It was a real diversion to see Jimmy get excited over his breadmaking, till he would lift a flour-dabbed face and heap gross insult on their ancestry, or, with both dough-filled fists clenched above his head, jump up and down and challenge each tormentor to bloody combat. As Jimmy was not only a first-class fighter, but a super-first-class cook, these combats were always staved off by eleventh-hour apologies, for such a cook could not be allowed to run any risk of damage.

The boss, on his part, never got angry, for two very good reasons. In the first place, he was indulgent, and liked the "b'ys" to have their "little fun," even at his expense; in the second place, no one wanted him to get angry. There was a conviction, widespread and deep-rooted, that if Tim Gallagher should really lose his temper it would be most unpleasant for some one, and that some one would not be Tim.

So whenever (which was not often) the boys' nagging began to bore him, the broad, weather-beaten, craggy face of the boss would grow serious; and forthwith even the caustic wit of Long Eph Babcock, the logger from Androscoggin, would discreetly divest itself of all its sting. No matter how Tim Gallagher's authority might seem to totter, that he should merely look serious was enough to re-establish it promptly.

This afternoon of Christmas Eve, though the men had returned to camp to grumble, they presently found that even grumbling and Jimmy-baiting had lost their savour. Long Eph and Evan Morgan, the hunters of the day, had come back empty-handed. And every one dropped into a melancholy. They

fell to talking of what they'd *like* to have, if Tim Gallagher hadn't played them so low down, and if they had a cook that could tell his head from a dough-ball.

"To h-ll with yer puddin's, Jimmy!" said Long Eph, mindful of the fact that Jimmy Dillihunt was of French extraction. "Give us some of yer 'patty dee foy grass,' an' a 'ragowt' o' frogs."

"It's a swat in the gob ye'll git!" retorted Jimmy concisely, in English that was perfectly free from taint of foreign accent.

"I mind me," murmured Pat Nolan, in a tone of wistful reminiscence, "av a biled turkey stuffed wid inyuns an' eysters, what we had oncet down to Flaherty's, in Fredericton. I'm thinkin' I'll niver taste the loike ag'in."

At this picture every one groaned with the agonies of Tantalus. And even the boss growled—

"Oh, cut it out, Pat!"

"Boys," droned Evan Morgan, with a rapt look in his eyes, such as his Welsh ancestors may have worn when they hung listening to the harp beneath the towers of Harlech—"boys, have ye ever, any of youse, et a good,

juicy b'ar-steak—a b'ar that's fatted up on blueberries ? "

" Hain't I, jest ? " snarled Sam Oulton from his bunk, in a voice rendered vicious by the torments of memory.

" Well, be good, Sammy ! " drawled the long Androscogginer. " An' hang up yer little sock to-night. If it ain't *too* dirty, maybe Sandy Claws'll come along an' drop a bit o' b'ar into it fer ye."

The huge bulk of the boss, lounging indifferently along a bench behind the stove, suddenly sat bolt upright. Gallagher had a quick ear, and he was not listening to the chaff of his men.

" Hark to that, b'ys ! " said he. " Somebody comin' ! "

A heavy step, but shuffling and vague, crunched the snow just outside the door.

It was unheard of that a single visitor, a lone footfarer, should find his way at this season to so remote and isolated a camp as Gallagher's. The lumbermen are, for the most part, superstitious. They thought instantly of " loup-garous," or of the dreadful " Walker-of-the-Snow." The skin crept on their rough cheeks ; the camp fell dead silent.

But Eph Babcock, the Maine man, was chiefly curious. Not without superstition, he was nevertheless ready to welcome Beelzebub himself, as a diversion. He strode to the door. Pat Nolan had it on his lips to cry "Go aisy!" but restrained himself.

Eph flung wide the door.

The next moment he jumped back with a startled oath, and ran for his gun, which stood against his bunk, just behind where the boss was sitting.

Straight forward into the room, blinking in the lamplight, and undaunted by the array of human faces, came shambling an immense black bear.

Reaching the end of the long camp-table, the astounding visitor rose upon his hindquarters, and stood there, a shape as towering as Tim Gallagher himself, with his huge furry paws folded demurely over his vast breast. He peered about him deprecatingly, then began sniffing as loud as a donkey-engine, as his nostrils caught a number of mysterious but altogether delectable aromas on the steamy air.

Jimmy Dillihunt had snatched up his carving-knife, and whisked nimbly around behind

his oven. He felt that cooks were precious. The rest of the hands—not frightened, of course not, but embarrassed by the sudden appearance of a perfect stranger in their midst !—had more or less effaced themselves for the moment, by slipping modestly into their bunks. All but Evan Morgan. His bunk was not handy, so he stood up, very erect and respectful and unobtrusive, in the nearest corner—i.e., the corner nearest to him, not to the bear. The axes were all outside. And the one other gun besides Eph Babcock's stood beside the door, immediately behind the bear. Evan Morgan eyed it wistfully, but it looked very far away to him. Only the boss seemed unperturbed. He kept his seat, and coolly studied the visitor.

For about ten seconds the bear stood there motionless, looking bigger than an elephant to that circle of excited eyes. The silence was so tense that the rustle of a mouse in the roof sounded startlingly loud. For a moment the bear looked puzzled. Then his eyes fell upon a big tin basin, close by him on the table. The basin had been full, two minutes earlier, of smoking and molasses-drenched baked beans, which Jimmy Dillihunt had

just emptied into another receptacle. A seductive savour, together with several beans, still clung to its sticky interior.

Eagerly, yet with a certain diffidence, the bear stretched forth a mighty paw, drew the basin towards him, and began hungrily licking the inside, making a most unmannerly noise about it. Eph Babcock, by this time, had reached his gun, swung round, and raised it to his shoulder. But before he could pull the trigger a weighty hand fell upon his arm.

"Stop! Wait!" commanded the boss, in low but very positive tones. He felt that the confined space of the room would be a bad place for a life-and-death mix up.

Babcock stopped and waited, though he thought that was a fool thing for the boss to say. He lowered the gun, glanced into the breech, and grinned sheepishly.

"'Tain't loaded, anyhow!" he muttered, as if apologizing, but whether to the bear or the boss he did not say.

"This ain't no time to risk us losin' that nice, fat, juicy b'ar-steak Evan was talkin' about, Tim!" protested the rasping voice of Sam Oulton from the retirement of his bunk. But a discreetly muffled groan went

up from the range of bunks as all realized the predicament of Eph Babcock. He had no cartridges. And every one could see where the cartridges were. The two belts, well filled, were hanging on a peg by the door.

To Oulton's protest the boss made no reply. He was evidently too interested in the bear to pay any attention to Sam. Most of the fellows in their bunks were just bursting with suggestions as to how some other fellow might get those cartridges, and pass them back to Eph Babcock. But none of these suggestions, no doubt excellent, were ever advanced; for just at this point the conduct of the visitor became so remarkable that every one forgot what he had intended to say.

Having licked the basin clean, the bear looked up and whined. It was plain that he liked beans, and wanted more. He seemed to have simple, homely tastes, and several of the watchers in the bunks drew long breaths of relief.

The bear shuffled uneasily from one great foot to the other; and then, clutching up the basin in both forepaws, he turned and marched straight over toward Jimmy Dillihunt with

it. It was a touching appeal, but, as for Jimmy, he did not seem to understand it at all. Brandishing his carving-knife in frantic protest against being thus singled out from his fellows, he darted from behind the oven, and with one flying leap gained the companionship of Evan Morgan in the corner. Evan, who was beginning to recover his self-possession, grunted unsympathetically: "What's yer hurry, Jimmy?" But Jimmy vouchsafed no reply.

Disappointed at the sudden departure of one from whom he had apparently expected so much, the bear dropped his all-too-empty basin on the stove. The loud clatter startled him, and he side-stepped nimbly with a hop, like a girl who has just been about to step into a puddle. At the same moment he caught sight of the big pot of beans on the front of the stove, where Jimmy had put them to get heated up. How good they smelt! With a windy *woof* of satisfaction he grabbed a mouthful.

Now the beans, exemplary vegetables that they were, had been attending to business. They had been getting heated up. The bear was surprised and pained to find how hot

they were. Shutting his eyes tight, and working his jaws very fast, he tried to hold on to them. But they were too much for him. With a loud *wah*, he spat them out upon the floor ; and then, plaintively rubbing his nose, first with one great paw and then the other, he cast a piteous look around the room. That look caught Pat Nolan's eye. To the warmhearted little Irishman it seemed full of reproach.

" Sure, an' it wasn't me ez done it, me bh'y ! " murmured Pat, in a tone of tender consideration. " It was a low-down thrick o' Jimmy's. He'd ought ter 'ave wharned ye in time."

Something in Pat's voice seemed to suggest to the bear that here he might find that sympathy which, so far, had been conspicuously lacking in his reception. Doubtfully, but not without hope, he waddled slowly across the room toward Nolan's bunk.

" Didn't I tell ye it *wasn't* me ! " protested Nolan passionately. " Mother av Moses, can't some of yez bh'ys do somethin' to divart his attention ? "

" Fire me up that gun, Eph ! " snapped Sam Oulton, who had been rummaging frantic-

ally at the back of his bunk. "I've found some ca'tridges."

The boss was about to interfere, and Evan Morgan also, who knew more about bears than the rest of the lumbermen, but Eph Babcock had already handed up the gun, and desperate hands were passing it along to Oulton's bunk. But the bear had caught sight of it, and lunged forward swiftly amid a chorus of startled oaths. Just as the gun arrived at Oulton's bunk, and Oulton reached out to grab it, the bear arrived also. He was quicker than Oulton. He shot out a huge black paw and snatched the gun. Oulton vanished back into his bunk like a mud-turtle's head into its shell. The bear, with an air of triumph, slanted the gun over his shoulder, and fell to solemnly marking time!

"Good thing ye didn't have time to git her loaded up, Sammy!" piped the shrill falsetto of Shorty Johnson, from the bunk nearest the door. "The Colonel 'd 'ave cleaned out the camp with it."

The boss and Evan Morgan—and also little Pat Nolan, who had begun to realize that there was something unusual about this bear—permitted themselves to laugh. But the rest

looked with added consternation at this amazing performance of their terrible visitor. It was to them merely proof of a supernatural, and therefore, of course, malign, intelligence. They would not have been surprised to see him stride to the door, take down the cartridge-belt, and load up the weapon which he carried so handily on his shoulder. But as he continued to mark time, with his back to the door, and some distance from it, they began to recover their wits. Sam Oulton, in particular, again rose to the emergency. Not observing the grins of the boss and Evan Morgan, he stuck out his head once more, and cried—

"Now, Jimmy! Now's yer chance! Jump, man, an' set the pot o' beans outside in the snow. He'll go arter it. Then we kin kill him 'thout messin' up the camp."

But Jimmy was not anxious to step into the breach, even though the beans *did* seem to belong in his department.

"*You* go an' set the pot out, Shorty," he suggested, from behind the boss. "You're nearest."

"Be aisy there, now, Sammy," interrupted Pat Nolan. "What for would ye be wantin'

to kill a friendly baste like that, now? See how entertainin' he's tryin' to be."

"Entertainin' to h-ll! Thar's fresh meat on 'im to do us a month!" snarled Sam.

From more than one of the bunks came murmurs of protest against Oulton's blood-thirsty utterance, so suddenly does sentiment veer in the camps. And from Evan Morgan came a two-edged retort.

"Can't ye never think o' nawthin' but that —— —— —— —— belly of yourn?" he demanded.

Sam Oulton was getting sore.

"What you fellers wants is nursin'-bottles!" he sneered. "Ef this 'ere camp's growed to be a d——n kindergarten, I reckon I'll hev to kill the critter all by meself!" And he began to emerge, not too briskly, from the seclusion of the bunk.

At this point, the boss, who had now sized up the situation fully, thought it time to intervene. The bear, with the gun across his shoulder, was still ponderously marking time. But he looked as if he were waiting for something.

"March!" said the boss, in a sharp voice.

Instantly the bear marched forward, with

awkward but solemn strides, straight down the room, toward the group formed by the boss, Evan Morgan, Eph Babcock, and Jimmy Dillihunt. The boss awaited him calmly, as did Evan. But Eph and Jimmy began to sidle away nervously around the table.

"Halt!" commanded the boss—before the bear got *too* near.

The bear halted. And every one drew a long breath.

"Now, Sammy," began the boss, in oracular tones, "you stow that talk o' yourn about killin'! Ain't ye got no eyes in yer head? He's a *tame* bear, *he* is. An' right glad to be back amongst friends after loafin' round them lonesome winter woods. Watch 'im now! It's a right smart sojer he is. 'Ten*shun*!"

At the sudden sharp word of command the bear came to attention. But he tried to do it too quickly. The gun slipped from his big, furry paw and clattered to the floor. He ducked nervously and shut his eyes tight, as if expecting a blow.

Clearly Tim Gallagher was right. It was a trained bear that had come to claim their

hospitality. Pleased as children, the men began dropping from their bunks with varied comments.

"The Colonel's all right! Don't swat 'im fer droppin' his gun, Tim!" cried Shorty Johnson, slipping down the other side of the table.

"Mebbe, Sammy 'ld like to try a wrastle with 'im!" suggested Eph Babcock. "Make an interestin' show fer Christmas Eve."

Oulton crawled back sourly into the depths of his bunk, and bit off an extra chew of black-jack to help him bridle his tongue. He perceived himself to be in a very chilly minority.

Jimmy Dillihunt, meanwhile, suddenly repentant of his suspicions, had slipped into his den. Now he came forward boldly, bearing in his hand a long generous strip of smoked bacon-rind. The bear smelled it and opened his eyes. He began to realize that he was not going to be struck for dropping his gun. He gazed at the tit-bit, then at Jimmy's dark face, and stretched out a hopeful, but diffident, paw. But as Jimmy made no response to this appeal, the bear seemed to conclude that he must do something to earn the prize—something difficult

and distinguished. With a whimper he sank down, put his nose between his legs, slowly and gruntingly heaved up his vast hind-quarters, and stood fairly and squarely on his head. For several seconds he balanced himself there; and then, slowly and gruntingly again, he came down, resumed his upright attitude, and turned coaxingly to Jimmy.

The camp fairly yelled with delight.

"Give it to him, Jimmy!" "Ye couldn't 'a' done better yerself!" "He's arned it, sure!" "Look smart, Jimmy, er he'll think ye're cheatin', an' swat ye!" "Good old Colonel!" came the shouts of approval from every one but Sam Oulton.

Jimmy held out the bacon-rind, and the bear took it delicately with his great, armed paw.

"Light ez a lady's little hand!" cried Pat Nolan, in his enthusiasm.

From this point on the evening resolved itself into a species of reception. Gallagher's Camp, in fact, was giving an At Home to the Colonel, for Shorty Johnson's epithet had hit and stuck. The Colonel was a bear of vast and varied accomplishments, and, withal,

of a simple faith in humanity. His childlike confidence in every one's goodwill touched the big-hearted and quickly sentimental lumbermen till they were as extravagant over him as a bunch of children with a baby. It became a reproach to Eph Babcock that in the first moment of undiscriminating surprise he had run for his gun.

"Eph," said Pat Nolan, "had ye har-rmed a hair o' his inganious and confidin' head, I'd 'uv been under the painful necessity o' rippin' out yer gizzard wid me own fair hand."

"An' I allow 'twould 'a' been no more than I deserved, Paddy," drawled the Androscogginer amiably. Every one was hilarious but Oulton. He, injured and scornful, maintained a superior silence throughout the evening; and he would hardly deign to glance at the bear's most entertaining feats. But the whole camp knew he was interested, all the same.

It was a great night that for Gallagher's Camp. The Colonel was the first to tire of the excitement. This, as every one allowed, was but natural, he having been the whole show. Now, full fed and happy, he wanted to go to sleep, a fact which he manifested by poking around in the corners for a place to lie down.

On the thick fur of his neck was a worn spot showing where a collar had once been. With a bit of heavy harness-strap the boss made him a new one, and led him, unresisting and bland, to the long walled shed which served the camp as a smithy. A big armful of straw was brought from the barn, and the Colonel, eagerly clawing it about him, settled himself down with the air of the prodigal who has got home, and is glad of it.

On the following day the boss prudently decreed that the Colonel should not be allowed in the house till dinner-time. His deep design was thereby to preserve a certain freshness of interest for the festivity, that the men might be the more diverted, and the less likely to grumble over the absence of fresh meat. Throughout the morning, as usual on Sundays and holidays, the men busied themselves lazily about the camp, washing, mending, smoking, whittling within doors, or skylarking outside in the snow.

When the Colonel was let out, just after breakfast, there was none of this skylarking going on, or he would no doubt have stayed at home to play with his new friends. As it was, finding himself denied admittance to the

house, he carefully explored the premises, alarmed the horses by sniffing loudly at the stable-door, and then lumbered off into the woods.

"He'll be back all right afore long," said Gallagher. "The Colonel knows a good thing when he's stumbled on to it."

And Gallagher was right. He understood men and Colonels. Along about half-past ten in the morning, as Eph Babcock and Shorty Johnson were "wrastling" just outside the camp door, they caught sight of the bear emerging from the woods at the far side of the clearing. There was nothing singular about that, but there was something so singular about his movements that the two panting combatants broke grip by simultaneous consent, and stood gaping. Their exclamations brought out the whole camp to see what was up.

"'Pears to be havin' heaps o' fun with himself," droned Evan Morgan from the door-sill.

"'Tain't with *himself*, exactly," corrected the boss.

"No, I'll be gol-durned if 'tain't a big porkypine he's got thar," drawled Babcock.

"An' *it's* a-chasin' *him*, begorr'!" cried Pat Nolan in amazement.

Which was true enough, in a sense.

The Colonel was prancing and cavorting ludicrously from side to side, like a gigantic but very youthful puppy, before the indignant porcupine, which came on steadily, with every quill bristling, till he looked as big as a bushel-basket. The Colonel was backing toward the camp, as if he wanted his friends to share his new plaything, this strange, ill-tempered little beast which he had come across in the woods.

"He'll go gittin' himself stuck full o' quills," said Shorty Johnson; "an' ye'll have one h-ll of a job gittin' 'em out, Tim. I'm glad he's *your* b'ar, not mine."

Sam Oulton looked as if the prospect thus opened up were not unpleasing to him.

"Don't you fret, Shorty," retorted the boss. "That bear ain't nobody's fool. He knows a thing or two about porkypines."

As a matter of fact, the Colonel was taking good care not to go too near those dangerous quills. He would reach out first one paw, playfully and teasingly, then the other, and pat *at* the angry little animal, but he knew better than to touch it.

As for the porcupine, it was evidently in a towering rage with its tormentor. A porcupine is not only very fearless, it is also very stupid; and when it makes up what stands for its mind to go in any particular direction, only death, or something to eat, can divert it.

In the present case this porcupine had made up its mind to go in the direction of the Colonel, hoping, no doubt, in the face of all appearances, to overtake him and fill him full of quills. As the Colonel was retreating toward the camp, toward the camp also came the porcupine, indifferent to odds. For a scrap of well-salted fish-box, an old porcupine, who has been more or less crossed in life, would charge an army entrenched.

The peril was averted, however, by the prompt intervention of Jimmy Dillihunt. The Colonel's retreat had brought the porcupine already within fifty feet of the camp, when suddenly, with a piercing "*hoo-ee,*" Jimmy Dillihunt sprang to the front, armed with the poker. Pushing the astonished Colonel aside, he struck the procupine accurately on the tip of its blunt nose. The forest of rampant quills collapsed. With a twitch-

ing of its short, sturdy legs the porcupine rolled over, stone dead.

The Colonel sat up on his haunches and gazed admiringly at Jimmy. The rest of the spectators yelled approval in assorted but more or less unpublishable terms. Jimmy picked up the limp form of the porcupine gingerly, by its unarmoured forepaws, and carried it in.

"Mighty good eatin', porkypine, when he's *cooked* right!" said he, with a triumphant grin, as he vanished into his sanctum.

* * * * *

He was only one porcupine, to be sure, but he was an extra large and fat one, and Jimmy Dillihunt knew how to make him go a long way. He made him into a stew, with plenty of dumplings, and also, it must be confessed, with a very great deal of salt pork, cut small. As it takes little porcupine to give much flavour, all the pork in the stew tasted like porcupine, and no one had cause to complain. The dinner was an unqualified success.

The Colonel, wandering up and down behind the banqueters, kept presenting himself persuasively to each in turn for the titbits which each was eager to give him. At

length he came to Sam Oulton, whom he had hitherto avoided for lack of encouragement. There was a lull, every one wondering what Sammy, the irreconcilable, would do.

Oulton looked down at the Colonel's huge, confiding head thrust in beside his elbow. He hesitated, grinned amiably but sheepishly; then drew his sleeve across his shining mouth, lifted his big tin of coffee, and rose resolutely to his feet.

"Mr. B'ar—I mean Colonel," said he, "here's a right Merry Christmas to ye, an' many of 'em! Ye're the only parfict gentleman in this 'ere camp, for ye're the only one of the crowd ez has had the kind thoughtfulness to hand out a Christmas present to his friends."

And he gave the Colonel the wish-bone!

The Gauntlet of Fire

IN a way they knew each other pretty well these two, the man and the bear. For nearly two years they had been acknowledged adversaries.

The man had actually seen the bear but once, and then for a swift glimpse only—a flash of shrewd, fierce, inquisitive eyes from a spruce thicket, and a portentous black shadow sinking away noiselessly into the chequered gloom. But he knew well those great tracks—a third as large again as those of the average black bear of Eastern Canada—which drew their menacing trail all about his cabin. He knew those claw-marks on the deep-scarred stretching-trees, where the owner of the claws set his signature almost as high as a grizzly might have set it.

And he had studied sundry massive stumps, only half decayed, which those redoubtable claws had ripped open like punk in the search

for ants and grubs. From all this it was not difficult to infer that he had here a formidable rival for the sovereignty of this wilderness domain which he had just pre-empted—a rival who would probably, by and bye, when the little farm came to be stocked, levy severe tax on his sheep and cattle.

Moreover, he realized that this rival must be clothed in a pelt of special magnificence, which would command a special price in the fur-market. In the intervals of his chopping and clearing, his potato-planting and his sowing of buckwheat, his barn-building and his brush-burning, he went about to set traps for this dangerous antagonist, who, as he rightly inferred, would be too crafty to come within reach of his gun.

The bear, on the other hand, knew the man much better than the man knew him. From the man's first arrival on the banks of the wild South Fork, the great black beast had shadowed him—with some hostility, of course, as a stranger, and a disturber of the solitudes, but more with a keen curiosity. For all his giant bulk, he could move, when he chose, as noiselessly as a mink or a snake. Motionless as one of the ancient stumps left by forgotten

lumbermen, he had watched the flash and the swing of the man's axe, the crashing fall of birch and fir and ash, as the clearing widened and let in the sunlight upon the tangled forest floor.

With wonder he had seen the two powerful red oxen, obedient to the man's sharp word of command, drag the trimmed logs into one place; and then had marked the cabin grow into shape, a surprising shape, beneath the man's skilled hands. At first he had been amazed that the two great oxen should be so subservient, instead of turning upon the man and piercing him with their long horns or trampling him beneath their cleft hoofs.

But soon he had grown to appreciate an inexplicable mastery in the man's voice, in his unconscious indifference to whatever eyes might be watching him from the dark, surrounding coverts. It was plain that the man had no fear. Then, of a certainty he must be very strong. So the bear began to fear, though he could perceive, at first, no cause of fear, except that mysterious something in the man's voice, which seemed to make the oxen obey and toil with grunting patience.

And then, one day after the cabin was built,

when the man was out of sight within, and the heat hummed with gnats and flies all round the sun-steeped clearing, and the red oxen lay in the shade chewing their cud lazily and heaving great windy breaths, he had seen a tall buck wander out from among the trees and stand staring at the cabin.

The man had stepped forth from the cabin door, and raised to his shoulder what looked like a long, brown stick. Instantly a jet of white flame had leapt from the tip of the stick, with a short, biting roar. And the buck, far away at the other side of the clearing, had leapt into the air and fallen forward on his muzzle, dead. A chill had shuddered across the bear's nerves at this sight, and he had sunk back further into the thickets.

No wonder the big, red oxen, for all their savage-looking horns, obeyed this being, who, simply by pointing a little stick and making a sharp noise, could kill from very far off. Thereafter the bear was still more wary in his observation of the terrible intruder, but this dread and hostility only made him the more watchful. Clearly he could not afford to lose sight of the man for any length of time, lest

unguessed and unheard-of things should happen.

In this way it came about that when the man, having got his first seeding and planting over, and his cabin weather-tight, set about the enterprise of trapping the bear, the bear knew something about it. Of all the unseen, inquisitive spectators whose shy, wild eyes watched the work—squirrels, partridge, hares, raccoons, rain-birds, wood-mice, deer, foxes, and owls—the bear was by far the most interested and the most comprehending.

When the first trap—a massive dead-fall—was built, baited, and set, and the man had gone away to leave it free to do its cruel work, the bear had subjected it to a most sagacious scrutiny. Though no one had ever told him how Troy fell, he had been gifted by Nature with that rudimentary sagacity in which the men of Troy seem to have been so unhappily deficient; and he feared the man, even bearing gifts. He smelt the bait—a lump of savoury fat pork—at a discreet distance; and decided to have nothing to do with it. Not for any good purpose, he thought, could such a delicacy be left to the first chance comer.

While he was watching and pondering, hidden in a clump of fir-seedlings whose aromatic fragrance disguised his scent, a bob-tailed wild-cat came prowling by. She saw the glistening white bait, held up to her so temptingly on the prong of the deadfall. Her round, pale eyes gleamed greedily, though her ears flattened in angry apprehension at the strong man-smell of the tracks surrounding it. She was not intelligent, the bob-cat. She knew enough, merely, to know that the delectable morsel belonged to the man. Well, he was nowhere in sight. Even now, she could hear his far-off voice shouting to those stupid oxen. Crouching low, she ran forward with swift stealth, and pounced, with a low growl of exultation, upon the prize. Something seemed to give way. With startled eyes the bear saw those three massive logs, which formed a roof above the bait, come crashing down upon it. With an ear-splitting screech, cut short almost ere it had begun, the unhappy bob-cat was flattened out beneath them.

A red squirrel, which had been watching the whole thing from a near-by branch, burst forth into hysterical chatterings. And a crow,

dropping on black wings from the tree-tops, alighted delicately on one of the logs, and with head cocked knowingly, as if to say "I told you so," peered down with hard, bright eyes at the dead wild-cat. He held that all wild-cats should be dead. It was the only way he liked them. But the manner in which this one's destruction had been brought about struck him as most mysterious.

From that day all the man's possessions seemed to the bear to partake of the nature of traps—to be studied with dreadful interest, but on no account to be touched. So it came about that when, in course of time, the man brought a cow and a calf to the expanding clearing, and a pig, and then sheep, and half a dozen fussy hens, the bear never laid a paw on one of them. His mouth watered over the sheep in particular, but they looked too suspiciously easy. They were surely traps. If he should seize one, the sky, perhaps, would fall upon him and crush him as flat as the wild-cat. The man, instead of appreciating this forbearance, took it as a matter of course, and gave it never a thought. But he grew furious at last at the failure of all his trapping devices, and swore to have the bear's pelt before another winter.

Late that summer came a time of scorching drought. The South Fork stream, a turbulent torrent always, and fed by unfailing spring lakes in the upper barrens, shrank but little. The main Ottanoonsis, however, revealed parched bars and hoary ledges which the oldest woodsmen in three counties had never before seen dry. Many a forest brook vanished altogether, its memory surviving only in chains of still, black water-holes lurking under the giant roots in the cedar and hackmatack swamps. And many a wilderness lake left its lilies to die on a stinking stretch of raw, root-cumbered mud. The man, however, was not greatly troubled, for hardly three hundred yards away, beyond the foot of his clearing, flowed the South Fork, defiant of all droughts. His buckwheat and potatoes were too well advanced to be quite spoiled by lack of rain. And his stock were sure of water.

The South Fork, at this point, and for perhaps half a mile each way above and below the clearing, ran not so wildly but that the man could navigate it in comfort and fish it from his big " dug-out " canoe. Lower down, the rapids became almost impassable, for a

distance of some twelve or fifteen miles, till at last the mad stream calmed itself in a low-shored, shallow lake, fringed with blueberry plains.

Under the lifeless air and dry, stagnant heat the forest seemed to gasp heavily, waiting for the rain. Presently, instead of the longed-for clouds, greycool, and fragrant with shower, across the hard blue came a dun-coloured haze, through which the sun took on the look of a disk of hot copper. The balsamy odours of the forest gave way to faint, acrid breaths which made the eyes smart and the nostrils burn. The eagles, hawks, crows, and all strong-flying birds, disappeared. All the four-footed prowlers of the forest coverts grew uneasy, apprehending dangers which they knew not how to combat or to flee from. The great black bear, after sniffing anxiously with muzzle high in air, toward every point of the compass, lost all interest in the man and his works, and took himself whimpering away to a point about five miles downstream, where a deep inlet of dead-water jutted off from the tumbling current of South Fork.

A little later the man, who had been working in a dispirited way among his sickly-

looking potatoes, leaned upon his hoe and eyed the changing sky with apprehension.

"Fire," he muttered, "somewheres round, an' mebbe not far off! Hope there don't blow up no wind!"

Then, throwing down the hoe, he yoked the oxen to the drag, and prepared to haul up two or three barrels of water from the river to the cabin. In case of chance sparks blowing across the clearing, he thought, it might be well to have water on hand.

He went about this task rather listlessly, weighed down by the dead air and by a vague sense of foreboding. But when he halted his slow team by the riverside he saw across the current a sight which shocked him into activity. The oxen saw it, too, and woke up, and began to snort and strain uneasily at the yoke. Beyond the fringe of tree-tops opposite, clouds of smoke were rolling up, with here and there a tongue of red flame flickering along their bases.

The man became a demon of energy. Leaping backwards and forwards with his bucket between the waterside and the barrel on the drag, and shouting furiously to the oxen to stand still, he speedily had the barrel full to

the brim. On the journey back to the cabin, however, he could not hurry. The track was none too smooth, and he had to steady the barrel laboriously lest its precious contents should spill. But the oxen needed no urging, and, after a perspiring struggle with the barrel through the hot and narrow trail, he came out upon the cleared knoll behind the cabin. There he stopped short in consternation.

Beyond the clearing, along the southward horizon, again those ominous clouds uprolling, again those thin, red tongues upleaping viciously and disappearing. From opposite sides the fire was closing in upon him. And only now did he realize the appalling peril. Water-barrels, indeed! With a bitter laugh and a curse at the futility of his efforts, a groan of rage over the ruin of all his hopes, he loosed the oxen from their yoke, and raced with long strides down the slope to set free the rest of the stock. He would give them all a fair chance for their lives, an even chance with his own. Then, snatching up his lean leather wallet and a blanket from his bunk, he raced for the river.

The bear, meanwhile, had reached the little inlet—or "bogan," as the Indians call it—

five miles below. He found it already thronged with silent, trembling refugees. For already, both to north and south, the sky was filled with smoke-clouds which volleyed up in dark, rolling masses, and winged flames were leaping ravenously from tree-top to tree-top.

To eastward the two conflagrations were drawing rapidly together under the draught of a rising east wind. They were converging with monstrous speed upon the river, which just at this point made a turn and went roaring off to south-westward, over a series of broken ledges. The clamour of the rapids was beginning to be dominated by a more awful sound—that of the hissing rush and mutter of the conflagration. Smoke-blasts, pungent and stifling, came belching erratically through the branches and swooping down upon the water, where they thinned and spread, and seemed to be absorbed in the momently discoloured foam. Here and there along the close-drawn skyline a towering, solitary pine-top would burst into flame and flare like a gigantic signal torch. And presently, hurled rocketing through the air as if from unseen explosions, came blazing, sparking brands, starting scout-fires, so to speak, in

advance, or dropping into the water with a harsh and terrifying hiss.

All around the shores of the narrow bogan crowded the beasts, watching with wide, fascinated eyes the flight and fall of these disastrous missiles. Several wild-cats, and one huge grey Canada lynx, crouched at the water's edge, or on out-thrust stumps and branches. As a brand fell near them their ears flattened to their skulls, and they shrank back, spitting wildly. Their ferocious hunting hunger was clean wiped out by fear, and they paid no heed whatever to the shuddering hares, gibbering squirrels, and stoical, indignant woodchucks which crowded about them. Even the bloodthirsty weasels for once forgot to kill, gliding nervously hither and thither among the trembling ranks. A red fox, self-possessed and game in the face of any doom, sat upon his haunches on the tip of a stranded log and eyed the tree-tops, searching in his deep, sagacious mind for some device that might outwit this awful adversary.

The surface of the bogan was alive with swimming mink, musquash, and water-rat, daunted by the catastrophe which was about to overwhelm the world, yet confident in the

power of the cold element they loved to protect them. Standing belly-deep in the water, and from time to time wallowing in it to cool themselves, were a black moose bull with two cows, and half a score of red deer. As for bears, there were none in the strange concourse except the great, black bear himself, he having jealously driven all rivals from his range.

Now, after a brief survey of the situation, the bear waded into the water. He plunged his head beneath the surface to ease the smart of burning eyes and nostrils. At the point where he had entered it the bogan was shallow, yet with a soft, sticky bottom which was distasteful to his feet. As he stood lifting one foot after the other, uneasily, out of the gathering smoke-pall came whirling down a huge brand, red-hot, and struck a wild-cat crouching on a near-by branch. With a screech the cat bounced into the air, and, finding herself about to fall into the water, which she loathed, squirmed sideways, and succeeded in clutching the bear's capacious back. Her claws sank deep, and, with a growl of pain, he tried to shake her off. Mad with terror, and appearing to regard him as nothing

more than an animated log, she clung and clawed the more tenaciously. At any other time he would have wrenched her from her place and torn her to pieces. But now it never occurred to him to be enraged. The matter was quite impersonal. He only realized that something on his back was hurting him, and he wanted to get rid of it. Throwing himself down, he rolled over in the water, burying the cat in the ooze.

When he got up again his objectionable burden was gone. But he was dissatisfied with his place in the bogan. The water was not deep enough to suit him. And, moreover, he felt like a rat in a corner. He wanted more space, more air, more view, even if there were nothing but horrors for the view to reveal. Shouldering aside a couple of red bucks, who hardly noticed him with their great, soft eyes of terror, he waded out to the entrance of the bogan. Here, where he could feel the pull of the eddy trying to drag him out into the rapids, he took his place in a depth of water that came about his shoulders. An ungainly cow-moose stood close beside him, flapping her big ears despondently, and staring, not at the flames, but at the discoloured

waves and whipped foam racing by. Then past his nose came swimming leisurely a big brown otter. Lifting head and shoulders high above the surface, like a watchful seal, the swimmer surveyed the rapids, and then plunged straight into them, heading fearlessly downstream. He had evidently made up his mind that not much longer would the little bogan serve for a refuge. The bear eyed his departure wistfully, and pondered it, but had no heart to dare the lashed waves and roaring ledges.

But by this time the roar of the ledges was unheard for the wide, ravening tumult of the flames. As they leapt and swooped they almost seemed to scream, and it was as if the smoke-clouds themselves found voice and thundered. The heat grew suffocating, intolerable; and sparks and brands fell so thick about the bogan that some of the beasts, with fur suddenly shrivelling, went mad and raced off into the furnace, while others simply toppled into the water and were drowned forthwith. The beasts who knew the water sank themselves as deeply into it as they could, and shudderingly awaited their doom, but the wise fox, swimming cautiously around

the edges of the bogan and investigating it, found at last a hollow under the bank, with drenched roots screening the entrance. This admirable little retreat was already packed with muskrats and a few mink, but he crowded himself in without ceremony, thrusting others out to shift for themselves. And as the dim annals of his race record that he lived to hunt hare and partridge, in later years, about the scarred stumps of the man's abandoned clearing, it is evident that the retreat proved a safe one.

The bear, meanwhile, as the fiery doom closed in upon him, began to tremble. Except for the wise fox, he was the only beast in all that wretched company with intelligence enough to think and to realize the full horrors of their fate. There was no hole under the bank big enough to shelter his huge bulk. He whimpered miserably, and turned his eyes with longing down the wild channel by which the other had fled. But he could not dare the path. It seemed an equally sure destruction. And already it was but a seething, darkened avenue of violence between two walls of smoke and flame.

And the bogan, too, was now a place of

horrors. Its surface was covered with the survivors of the smaller beasts, a wild-cat or two, innumerable squirrels, with weasels, martens, woodchucks, mice, raccoons, and even a few hares whom the hour of supreme despair had taught to swim. The rest were dead. Several of the deer, too, had gone under, in the bedlam struggle that now milled blindly in the centre of the pool. Besides the bear, only the sombre and stoic moose held themselves aloof from that fatal vortex, lying down in the water, and lifting their muzzles from time to time to draw a scorching and suffocating breath.

Suddenly, chancing to turn his despairing eyes upstream, the bear saw a wild shape dashing downward towards him through the spray and smoke. In another moment he recognized it. It was the man, crouched low in the stern of his log canoe, and steering it, with frantic paddle, between the rocks and leaping surges. He had a blanket partly twisted about his head; and one corner of it, streaming out behind him, smoked and smouldered. He headed the canoe into the bogan, and just saved himself from upsetting as he ran slantingly against the submerged

back of one of the moose. He came to a stop within arm's-length of the bear, and the latter saw that he was curiously changed in appearance. His great, sinewy hands and gaunt face were blackened and drawn, and his eyes stared terribly from sockets whence eyebrows and lashes had been scorched away. Nevertheless, to the bear his coming brought a sense of security. Here, he felt, was a master spirit, such as even the monsters of the fire would not overcome. He whined and drew nearer to the canoe, a dim hope rising in his heart. The man noticed him, and even in that moment of desperation recognized him, with distorted grin, as the antagonist who had so long eluded his snares.

"The both of us has got it in the neck, this time, old pard, I reckon!" he muttered thickly, snatching off the blanket and hurriedly sopping it over the side of the canoe. Then, swinging it once more, all dripping, about his shoulders and over his head, and gripping a corner of it between his teeth to enable him to breathe through it in the thick of the smoke, he thrust forth again into the current and went dashing down the rapids, under the low-rolling smoke-pall. For an instant the

bear hesitated, whimpering like a puppy, and then plunged after him.

As a matter of fact, the bear was a much better swimmer than he had guessed himself to be. After a few moments of bewilderment in the terrific, corkscrewing clutch and pull of the current, he found himself able to keep his head generally above water, and then to more or less choose his course.

At first he chose it badly, misreading the signs of the water. After having buffeted his breathless way through a series of mad "rips," he saw ahead of him a little to the right, what seemed a smooth passage through a barrier of breakers. Resolutely he struggled towards it as he swept down the channel. He gained it. His foot dragged bottom. He clawed frantically to check himself, but he was rolled clean over, and shot from the lip of a perpendicular ledge into the churning cauldron below.

Fortunately for him, the cauldron was deep enough to break the direct thrust of the torrent, and he was held in a sort of eddy till his wits and his wind came back to him. Then he made his escape at the side, and was swept on down the raging current. But now

he knew enough to avoid such spots of treacherous smoothness, and to choose in preference the steep, turbulent, heavily surging channels which indicate depth and a clear way.

The man, urged on by his powerful paddle, was now far ahead, and out of sight, but the bear felt confidence in following where he had led the way. Both shores of the river were now a raging furnace, a chaos of belching black smoke-bursts torn apart by sheets of red and orange flame. Tall trunks blazed for a few minutes above the tumult then toppled and fell, the crash of their fall unheard in the universal raving. The bear at times felt his very lips and nostrils wither in the heat, as he lifted his dripping head and snatched painful breaths. But he was no longer despairing, such confidence had he in the man's leadership.

At length the main current of the South Fork gathered itself into an appalling trough and shot downward with a thunder that even made itself heard amid the rage of the flames. The bear struggled to gain the broken shallows along shore, but he was too late. The current gripped him implacably. A moment more, and he was in the sluice. Irresistible cross-

currents seized him, rolled him over, sucked him under. Dull noises boomed in his ears, and his lungs were near bursting. Then all at once he was thrust up into the air again, strangling, and felt smooth rocks slipping by under his feet. The next moment his claws caught wood, and clung like a vice, and held. A second or two more and he was drawing himself clear of the torrent, and holding with all his force to some logs which had been driven and jammed into the jaws of a side-ledge. Right before his nose, to his amazement, was clinging the man, his body under water, in a crevice of the rocks, and his head, all but the eyes, swathed in the dripping blanket. The canoe was nowhere to be seen.

The man looked at the bedraggled and gasping beast with bleared eyes of recognition, and moved further along the logs to make room for him.

"Glad to see you, pardner!" he cried. "Make yourself right to home! You an' me's the sole survivors hereabouts, I guess!"

Either catching a faint sound of the man's words, or troubled by the man's eyes meeting his, the bear shrank back diffidently. But, when he felt again the current clutching at

his hindquarters, he once more came forward and crouched low in the backwash within reach of the man's arm.

For the moment both refugees were safe. They had water enough to cover them, and certain ridges of rock rising above the surface protected their faces from the direct force of the occasional devastating blasts of flame which licked out across the water. There was nothing to do but wait.

All that day, and all night (though when day passed into night they did not know) the man and the beast lay thus side by side, holding on to life, while the fire raged by, on either side and over them. Then it began to die down, leaving red stumps and trunks to smoke and smoulder up and down the shores, with here and there a lonely spruce still flaring. The air was now cool enough to breathe without discomfort; and a desolate grey dawn looked down upon the scene of ruin.

The man got up, stretched his numb legs, squeezed the water from his clothes; and now, so quickly do our wants change, turned his body to warm itself at the nearest glow. The bear watched him anxiously, but ventured

no nearer. He hung on to the man's movements as a dog might have done. He had lost, for the moment, all his initiative.

There was one thing that the man now saw clearly: there could be no escape to that fiery shore perhaps for several days, unless a deluge of rain should come to quench the glowing moss-beds. But between his precarious refuge and the shore, a little way downstream, he marked a spit of sand and gravel, with a few logs stranded upon it, and a sparse growth of low sandplum and osier. It lay so in the path of the driven spray from the ledges that, though the heat had blasted and shrivelled the bushes, it had not been able to burn them, or to do more than sear the logs with eating flame along their seams of balsam. To the man's eye this log-strewn gravel-spit seemed to offer a chance of escape if only he could reach it. But between raced a deep and turbulent current, which, strong swimmer though he was, he feared would whirl him away like a straw. If only the bear would try it first, he thought! Though on second thought he realized that that could tell him little in any case, the bear being able to master a tide

in which he would go under like a kitten. He looked at the bear appealingly, however, and shouted above the tumult of the rapids—

"Try it, pard! We can't hang out here all day!"

The bear thought he was being accused of some enormity, and shrank nervously to the lower edge of the refuge.

Seeing that there was nothing to do but put his fate to the test, the man wasted no more time. He knew he should gain neither strength nor resolution by waiting. Carefully keeping to the crest of the ridge between the two channels, he pushed his way upward against the divided and weakened current, in order to gain all the advantage possible for his perilous venture. When he could no longer resist the thrust of the current, he threw himself as far out into it as he could, and swam desperately, hoping against hope to gain enough to bring him within reach of the gravel-spit before being swept past it. In the next instant, however, he realized the futility of his hope. In that current he was no more than a whirled leaf.

The bear, meanwhile, had been watching

his movements eagerly as he worked his way upstream. He had no idea what the manœuvre meant, but he knew very well that the man could not leave their refuge by that route. When, however, he saw the man throw himself clear out into the channel, heading toward shore, he felt himself being deserted. With a whining cry, he, too, sprang out into the torrent. He dared not let the man out of his sight, lest the fire should come again to swoop at him.

In the grip of that sluicing flood he battled magnificently, holding his muzzle high ; and though he was carried downward at frightful speed, he nevertheless succeeded in making some progress diagonally. He had just about got the measure of the forces against him, and shaped such a course as would enable him to fetch the sandspit, when the man, to his astonishment, was swept down upon him, and grabbed him by the long fur of his haunches. Startled by this unexpected assault, he struck out more energetically than ever. And the man, swinging around behind him, shifted to his lower flank, and hung on inexorably.

In his alarm the bear gained the gravel

by a handsome margin, and scurried out upon it like a frightened cat. But that terrifying clutch was no longer on his flank. As he turned to see what had happened, the man stood, laughing breathlessly, at the edge of the gravel, and shouting—

"Thanks, pardner! You done noble!"

Much disconcerted at the laughter, which was something quite beyond his comprehension, the bear slunk off to the further side of the sandspit, and eyed wistfully the smouldering shores.

The man, having regained his breath, now proceeded to roll two of the logs together, side by side, in the quiet water at the tail of the sandspit. With the stringy roots of the sandplums and the little shoots of the scorched osiers, he lashed the two logs securely together, and then again yet more securely, till he had a raft that he thought would hold together in any rapid yet to be encountered. He knew that he was now not half a mile from the lake and the open barrens; and he knew, too, that all the worst ledges and chutes of the South Fork were past. He had neither paddle nor pole to guide his course, but he pushed off confi-

dently. As he did so he waved farewell to his fellow-refugee.

"Ye'd better sit tight now, pardner!" he shouted. "Ye're all right where y'are till the woods get a mite cooled down."

The bear, no longer daunted by the menace of the flames, but still nervous of that masterful clutch upon his flanks, appeared to accept the advice as final. At first he followed the raft to the edge of deep water, whining irresolutely. Then he sat down on his haunches, and watched it go ploughing and wallowing through the waves, with the man crouched upon it, till it vanished in a bend of the stream.

The Moose that Knocked at the Door

CHAPTER I

WHEN the snow stopped, and the wind, Carson's clearing was buried to the tops of the fence stakes. The old one-storey frame house—with its long shed, and then the low barn set at right angles to the shed so as to form a letter L—was buried nearly to the tops of the windows. The roofs, swept clean by the wind, showed black against the surrounding whiteness. In spite of the fact that the two days' storm was over and the sun was once more shining, the sky was still of a hazy pallor as if it held yet more snow to let drop upon the burdened world; and the sunlight had no sparkle. Along one side of the clearing the snow was heaped in huge drifts, and the fir trees towered above it in black ranks, shaken clean; while along the other side, under shelter of the forest, all the

trees were shrouded in white, their laden branches drooping to the ground.

But however dead and desolate the world outside, there was cheer within the house. The main room, which was at once living-room, hall and kitchen, was darkened to a curious twilight by the drifts of snow that veiled the window panes, but the effect was merely to shut out the outer loneliness and cold. A generous fire of seasoned birch and maple roared in the big kitchen stove, from whose wide-open "draft" a red glow spread across the room, flashing on the polished tins which hung along the opposite wall and gleaming capriciously from the white dishes and old blue china platters which lined the shelves of the spacious dresser.

At one end of the long deal table places were set for two, it being now nearly noon, the dinner hour in the backwoods. At the other end of the table Mrs. Carson—a large, bony woman with dark hair drawn back uncompromisingly from a kindly but irascible red face—stood "kneading up" the tray of dough for her week's baking. As soon as she could get the bread into the oven it would be time to dish up the dinner for herself and

Amanda. The warm air of the kitchen was savoury with a smell of corned-beef and turnips from the black pot that stood simmering on the back of the stove.

By the door Amanda was stamping vigorously and brushing the snow from her blue woollen skirt, using a somewhat frayed grey goose wing for a whisk-broom. Her bright, flower-like face was flushed with exercise, and wilful wisps of light-yellow hair, escaped from the thick, blue, home-knit hood which she wore tied under her chin, curled down across a pair of dancing blue eyes and a short, straight, well-modelled nose which had a tendency to go up in the air. It went up in the air now, with a gesture of gay audacity, as she tossed her small head to throw back the teasing curls. Though panting from the violence of her exertions she was laughing as if she had enjoyed them. She had been shovelling paths through the great drifts—from the house to the barn, from the barn to the well, and back from the well to the house—a heavy task, but one which, in her young enthusiasm and her joy at being home again from her months of teaching in the distant Settlement, she had made a game

of. The big wooden snow shovel, with lumps of snow still adhering to its wide blade, lay on the floor beside her where she had dropped it as she came in.

"There!" she cried joyously. "That was lots more fun than teaching 'leven times 'leven, mother. Those paths are great. I guess they'll last—till the next storm any way."

Mrs. Carson smiled without looking up as she deftly portioned the dough into the deep, black baking-pans.

"Well, child, pick up the shovel an' stand it behind the woodbox where it belongs. 'Tain't changed ye none, livin' there in Brine Settlement an' teachin' school. Want a little nigger to run 'round after you an' pick up things same as you used to?"

Amanda looked down at the shovel with a whimsical air of surprise at its thoughtlessness in being on the floor. She gave it a little kick, then picked it up and dutifully deposited it in its exact place behind the woodbox. Turning to her mother with the hopeful expression of one who has earned a reward she cried: "There, Mumzie! And now I want my dinner. I'm starving."

" It's been ready this ha'f hour," answered the mother, slipping a pan of dough into the oven. " You jest dish it up, child, an' I'll be with you in ha'f a minute."

Amanda plucked off her hood, flung it at a chair on the other side of the kitchen, made a pretence of smoothing her hair by pushing it up with the palms of her hands over both temples, then seized a fork and interestedly lifted the cover of the steaming pot.

Just at this moment there came a knock at the door. So strange a knock it was that Amanda dropped the pot cover, startled; and Mrs. Carson, just about to slam the oven door in her brisk way, paused and muttered under her breath: " Lands! What's that? " It was one unmistakable knock, heavy and indefinite, but followed by a vague sound as of scraping and fumbling.

Amanda, instinctively daring, took a couple of steps toward the door. Then she stopped. There was certainly something very " queer " about such a demand for admittance. The fumbling and scraping continued, punctuated with several light taps which somehow sounded unintentional. Then the heavy wooden latch half lifted in its deep socket,

as if something which did not quite understand how to work it was tugging at the latch-string outside. The delicate hair at the nape of the girl's white neck began to creep.

"'Mandy, don't you dare to go for to open that door!" whispered her mother, stepping nimbly around the stove to her side and clutching her arm.

But under her play of childish wilfulness the young girl's courage was high and cool.

"Nonsense, mother!" she replied in a low voice. "It's probably some one nearly dead with cold, too far gone to knock properly. We must open the door. It would be wicked not to." But as she spoke she ran into the bedroom and reappeared instantly with a rifle in her hands. As she went to the door she coolly opened the breech to see that the cartridge was in place, and she snapped it to with a loud click that might serve, if necessary, for a warning to the visitor.

Heedless of her mother's vehement commands, Amanda reached out her left hand to the latch, standing well back from the door and holding the rifle in readiness to leap in a flash to her shoulder. But before her

"A huge moose, with antlers spreading far beyond each doorpost, stood before her."

fingers could touch the latch, in a terrifying way it slowly lifted itself clear of the socket and the heavy door swung open. Amanda's first impulse was to hurl herself upon it and strive to shut it against the mystery. But before she could accomplish this she caught sight of the visitor and stopped in amazement. A huge moose, with antlers spreading far beyond each doorpost, stood before her blocking the whole doorway, and hesitatingly thrust in his great black muzzle.

"Shoot it! Shoot it!" cried Mrs. Carson. "It's tryin' to git in at us! Shoot it, I tell you!"

But Amanda, lowering the gun, broke into half-hysterical laughter. The tension had been brief but severe, and the relief was infinite. She had not realized how desperately frightened she was. But she understood animals, wild and tame, instinctively; and she loved them all. She reached out her hand and patted the great, appealing muzzle.

"Shoot him, mother? Why of course not! Don't talk of such a thing! See how he's trembling. Something has been chasing him and he's come to us for protection.

What could it be to frighten a great big thing like him ? "

Mrs. Carson had recovered herself by this time, but she was angry at having been so badly frightened.

" If you hain't got sense enough to shoot the critter, ' Mandy, then shoo him out an' shut that door, quick. I'll not have him gittin' in here an' tramplin' over things, I tell you. The impidence of him ! Shut that door this minute. You're lettin' all the cold in."

Amanda laughed cheerfully.

" He can't get in, possibly, Mumzie ! See, his antlers are wider than the door. I think he must be a tame moose who has been petted a lot, so that a house means friends and safety for him. Well, you've come to the right place, old fellow. I wish I knew what it was had scared you so."

The great beast's flanks were heaving violently and he still trembled ; but it was plain to Amanda that he now felt himself to be with friends. Stretching out his ridiculously long, overhanging, semi-prehensile upper lip he tried to get hold of a fold of the girl's skirt. The mystery of the lifted latch

was explained. He had been pulling at the string with that inquisitive lip.

Amanda stopped speaking for a moment, delightedly inspecting her protégé. Her mother, still excited, was just about to return to the attack when Amanda forestalled her.

"Oh, look!" she exclaimed. "I told you he was a tame moose, mother! He's been driven in harness. Look where it has chafed him on the shoulder. How perfectly lovely! I wonder if the poor dear would eat some cornmeal!"

Snatching a plate from the table she ran to the meal-barrel and scooped up a double handful of the coarse golden meal. Mrs. Carson, half ready to be mollified by the idea that the animal was really a tame one, looked on doubtfully while Amanda thrust the plate of meal under his muzzle. The moose sniffed at it, then, not recognizing the smell, blew an irresolute blast through his nostrils. The meal flew all over the floor and over the front of Amanda's dress. Straightway the moose, appearing to make up his mind that this was something good to eat, sank on his fore-knees and began greedily licking up the yellow particles. The

better to get at them he turned his head sideways and succeeded in jamming a portion of one great antler through the doorway.

But the sight of the spilt meal was too much for the tidy soul of Mrs. Carson, whose jarred nerves, moreover, took offence at the gay laughter with which Amanda greeted the animal's delinquency. Darting forward with a cry of "Git out o' here, you dirty beast!" she snatched up the wooden potato-masher and, before Amanda could stop her, aimed a furious blow at the offender's nose.

Accuracy of aim, however, was not one of Mrs. Carson's strong points. And besides, just at the crucial moment Amanda had caught her arm. The blow fell, not on the animal's nose but on one of the branchy points of the intruding antlers. It was a sturdy blow, as the good lady in her vexation had meant it to be. But the result of it was so out of all proportion to its intent that she recoiled with a horrified groan, dropping the potato-masher while Amanda wailed pitifully: "Mother, mother, how could you?"

The moose, startled by Mrs. Carson's assault, had lurched to his feet and withdrawn his head with such violence that the

antler was torn clear off. It fell at Mrs. Carson's very toes, its raw butt, suffused with tiny globules of blood, convicting her amazed eyes of an atrocious piece of cruelty. She wrung her hands and protested, half crying: "Oh, 'Mandy, I didn't mean to! How was I to know it would come off so easy?"

The victim, however, seemed comparatively unperturbed by his astonishing injury. After giving his head a vigorous shake, as if perhaps a bee had stung him, he dismissed the matter and once more thrust in his nose toward Amanda as if begging her for caresses. The loss of his antler he did not appear to notice. Then Amanda remembered that this was about the time when moose should shed their antlers. Her horrified face relaxed. She was on the point of bursting into wild laughter. But she checked her mirth sternly, thinking it advisable that her mother's penitence should endure a little.

"Poor critter!" muttered Mrs. Carson, picking up the shed antler and standing it respectfully against the wall, and regarding it as if she thought of trying to stick it on again. "Seems to me he's mighty good-

natured not to git ugly over a thing like that. Hadn't we better rub some mutton taller on to it, 'Mandy?"

"I don't believe it's worth while, mother," replied the girl. "You see, at this time of year there'll be no flies to bother the sore spot. I don't believe it hurts him so very much after all; because, you know, he'd have to lose his horns before spring any way. They always drop off some time in the winter; so it isn't as if it would never grow out again."

"Oh!" exclaimed the woman in a tone of immense relief. "I forgot about 'em sheddin' their horns. But I reckon it must 'ave hurt all the same. Looks mighty red an' sore. An' all I can say is I'd 'a' made more fuss than he did if any one had 'a' done that to me!"

Amanda broke out into a peal of laughter which made the moose draw back in astonishment.

"Well, well, child," said her mother testily, "you know what I mean! Don't be so smart. Git your old critter tied up in the barn if you're goin' to, and don't keep dinner waitin' all day."

Amanda became thoughtful. "But I don't quite know how we're going to get him there," she answered.

"Why," said Mrs. Carson, "if he was a horse you'd lead him. An' if he was a cow you'd drive him. Now which is he? That's for you to decide, being a school-teacher, an' your business to know such things. But do be quick about it afore we freeze stiff." And she turned away resolutely to dish up the dinner.

"Of course," said the girl with authority, "he's much more of a cow than a horse. But I think I'll try leading him, all the same. He doesn't look as if he'd be easy to drive. Please hand me that bit of clothes-line, mother, there's a dear!"

Mrs. Carson complied, and then brought the girl her hood and put it on her head impatiently. Amanda, with the skill of one who has been brought up on a farm, knotted the rope first about the animal's neck and then around his muzzle, forming a halter—a process to which he submitted with a patient air which showed that he was used to it. Then she pushed his great forehead vigorously with both hands, to make him

get out of the doorway. He obeyed at once, backing carefully as if stepping between shafts; and when she turned to lead him down the deep, narrow path to the barn he followed so close that his ponderous muzzle was thrust over her shoulder.

They had almost reached the barn when the moose lifted his head with a jerk and gave an angry snort. Amanda, following his eyes, peered away across the white, undulating surface and caught sight of three shadowy grey shapes just slinking into the woods.

"Wolves!" she remarked to her follower. "So that was what was hunting you, was it? Well, you don't seem to be much afraid of them now!" And she concluded that the slinking beasts had been harassing and trailing their great quarry without daring to come within reach of his hoofs and antlers until he should be too worn out to defend himself. It was evident that they had no taste now for following up the venture.

For a few seconds the moose glared fiercely after his vanished foes, then followed his conductor obediently into the barn. Old Jerry, the sorrel horse whom Amanda had ridden as a child, from his stall whinnied

inquiringly at sight of the tall stranger; and the two red and white cows snorted and backed in their stanchions. But the moose paid them no attention whatever. It was plain that he felt quite at home in a barn with cattle and horses. Amanda tied him beside the haymow where he could help himself; then, chafing her numbed fingers, she raced back to the house, eager to get in out of the stinging cold. Her mother was already seated at the table awaiting her.

"Won't that splendid fellow be a great Christmas present for Dad!" she cried joyously, patting back her rebellious wisps of hair and hastily rinsing her slim fingers before she sat down.

"I'd like to know what good he'll be to him!" said Mrs. Carson sceptically. "With them legs o' his he'll walk right over all the fences an' eat up everything he takes a shine to. I never did see, 'Mandy, what you could find so interestin' in all such outlandish critters. Give me a good horse, or a cow that don't jump, or even a dawg, says I."

"Well, mother, I like them too, you know!" agreed Amanda happily, evading the discussion.

CHAPTER II

It wanted but two days of Christmas, and there was yet much to be done in making ready for Christmas Eve when, according to his custom, John Carson would arrive home hearty, ruddy and hungry after his long trip in from the lumber camps on Black River. Mrs. Carson and Amanda had a busy afternoon making pies—pumpkin, apple, mince—and frying in the great pot of sputtering lard an endless array of fragrant, goldy-brown doughnuts. The two women were little concerned about the storm, which had drifted full the narrow, backwoods roads. They knew that it would be a storm, indeed, that could hinder John Carson on his snowshoes from getting home for Christmas. What was forty miles of wilderness trail to him even though the mercury should be hovering around the twenty-below-zero? Unfailing as the almanac he would come shouting over the twilight fields, kick off his snowshoes at the door and impatiently wipe the frost from his bearded lips before catching wife and daughter to his breast. Neither woman was troubled by misgivings on this score.

The event of the season would not fail them.

Occupied as she was Amanda had no time to devote to the big stranger in the barn. But when, toward sundown, she and her mother went out to milk the cows and fodder the stock for the night she found that he had managed to knock off his remaining antler, probably having felt the uneven weight an annoyance. The change which this wrought in his appearance met with Mrs. Carson's hearty approval for, as she remarked to Amanda, it made him look "so much more natural-like." She went up and stroked him condescendingly; and as he, in return, nibbled trustfully at her apron with his long, sensitive muzzle, Amanda saw that his position in the family was assured. She knew that her mother, having once accepted him, would love him as she did Old Jerry and the red and white cows.

The following morning was one of blue, unclouded sky and snapping cold. Amanda had intended putting the moose in harness to see if he were really broken to it. But there was still too much to be done in the house. The plum pudding was yet to be prepared. Instead of the novel and exciting

pastime of harnessing a giant bull moose she saw her duty sternly pointing her to the task of stoning raisins. With a sigh she obeyed; and she managed to get some consolation from the raisins themselves, which were sweet and plump, the very best that Brine Settlement could supply.

The dish of raisins was a formidable one, for John Carson had always an appetite and liked his pudding rich. But before Amanda was halfway through her task she was interrupted—and the raisins were forgotten.

There came a peremptory knock, which was repeated before Mrs. Carson could get to the door. The visitor proved to be a good-looking young fellow, who kicked off his snowshoes outside and pulled off his deep fur cap ceremoniously as he entered. Mrs. Carson hastened to bring him a chair; while Amanda, whose hands were conspicuously sticky, pushed back her hair with a rounded, white forearm and flashed him a smile of cordial welcome. The stranger was dressed in the thick homespuns and cowhide "larrigans" of the lumberman, but at his throat, as he threw open his heavy jacket, showed a collar obviously fresh and obviously linen,

with a neatly tied four-in-hand cravat. He had a strong-featured though boyish face, with dark, direct eyes and a close-trimmed brown moustache, and from the accents of his greeting Amanda decided at once that though he might be from the lumber camps he was certainly not of them.

"Won't you set up closer to the fire?" suggested Mrs. Carson heartily. "It's a right cold day out."

"No, thank you, not just yet. My fingers are a bit numb!" replied the visitor, pulling off his woollen mittens and chafing his hands —which, as Amanda noted, were strong and well kept. "You are Mrs. Carson, aren't you?" he continued.

"The same," said Mrs. Carson, while Amanda, not to be quite left out, nodded assent.

"My name's Ross—Alec Ross. And I'm just on my way in from Donovan's Camp on Forks Brook. I happened to stop in at Crimmins's—and it was lucky I did. I found Mrs. Crimmins desperately ill—pneumonia or something of that sort, I should think. And she's all alone. No one else in the house but her little three-year-old boy

and her feeble old grandfather who, as you know, is almost as much of a care as the child."

"Oh!" exclaimed Amanda commiseratingly, setting the bowl of raisins on the table and going to wash her hands. The young man's eyes followed her with quick appreciation.

"My, but that's bad!" said Mrs. Carson in a worried voice. "The old man's pretty nigh stone blind an' deafer'n a post."

"I fixed things up the best way I could," Ross continued, "and now I'm hurrying in to the Settlement for the doctor. But you know what that will mean. The best I can hope to do won't get him back there before to-morrow morning. It's dreadful to think of what may happen in the meantime. I thought—I hoped—there might be some one here who could go over and stay with them till I get back. But I see it is impossible. No woman alone could get a team through those fifteen miles of drifts that I have just come over."

Mrs. Carson wrung her hands.

"Oh," she cried in keen distress, "to think o' poor Nancy Crimmins in sich trouble an'

us not able to lift a finger to help her! Quick there, 'Mandy, git Mr. Ross a cup o' hot tea. No, Mr. Ross, you set right where you are," she continued with decision, seeing that the young man had risen to go. "You spare two minutes to wait for your tea an' you'll go the faster an' the farther for it."

As it was yet a good twenty-five miles in to Brine Settlement, Ross recognized the wisdom of her advice and sank back into his chair, rubbing the stiff muscles of his calves. But he observed that Amanda was not getting the tea. Instead of that she was taking down a heavy, coonskin coat from the yellow clothes-press by the bedroom door.

"What on airth are you doin', child?" demanded her mother sharply, but with a note of anxiety in her voice.

"I'm going over to take care of Mrs. Crim mins till the doctor comes," said the girl quietly.

"But you ain't! You ain't goin' to stir out of this house, 'Mandy Carson," decreed her mother.

Now Amanda was nearly twenty-two years old, and it was a matter of general knowledge

that her control of the rather turbulent school at Brine Settlement was perfect. Her usually wilful mouth was not wilful at all now, but grave and firm.

"You know very well that I must go, mother," she answered gently. "Do you suppose I could stay here with poor Mrs. Crimmins maybe dying? Stay here safe and comfortable—stoning raisins?" she went on, with a little break in her voice. "Please, mother, get Mr. Ross his tea as quick as you can and then come and help me get ready."

There was a finality in this quiet speech that brought Mrs. Carson at once to terms. She bustled off to get the tea, but at the same time she became almost tearful in her excitement.

"Oh, why won't you never listen to reason, 'Mandy?" she wailed. "You was always that headstrong! But you'll never git there. You'll git stuck fast in the snow. An' you'll be frozen stiff, you know you will. An' oh! what will your poor father say when he gits home an' finds you gone? Mr. Ross," she cried, turning suddenly to the young man who had been watching Amanda with the keenest admiration, "you speak to her!

You tell her she can't do it, an' hadn't ought to try. Maybe she'll listen to a man ! "

Alec Ross got up from his seat. " Allow me to say, Miss Carson, I'm afraid your mother's right. I know just how you feel about it ; and if you'll allow me to say so I think your pluck is splendid. But you could never get a horse through those drifts all by yourself. It's hard, but I guess you'll have to give it up."

Amanda tossed her head defiantly. " That's nonsense ! " she declared. " Don't you suppose I can go on snowshoes just as well as you if I want to ? What's fifteen miles ? "

Ross hesitated. He did not want to alarm the two women, living there alone in the vast solitudes. But it was plainly necessary to be frank.

" I've no doubt you could do it if you say so," he replied. " But, strange as it may seem, there are wolves around this winter. For the last fifty years or so, as you know, they've been unheard of in this part of the country ; but now they've come back."

He spoke with an air of having settled the question. And Mrs. Carson beamed approval as she set the cup of hot, strong tea before him.

But Amanda answered very quietly : " Yes, I knew the wolves had come back ! " Both Ross and Mrs. Carson stared at her in amazement. " *You* don't seem to concern yourself much about them ! " she continued.

Ross threw back his jacket with a boyish gesture and displayed a pair of " thirty-eights " in his belt. " I'm ready for them if they should come along looking for trouble," said he.

" Well," said Amanda, " I'm really and truly not one bit worried about them either. They're nothing but skulking curs, these Eastern wolves. And I've got my Winchester, a repeater, which I know how to use. I'm not thinking about wolves—I saw three of them yesterday slinking along the edge of the clearing, and they ' put ' when they saw me. It was they that had been chasing my moose, mother. Well, now I'm going to hitch up my moose in the pung and see if his long legs won't pull me through the drifts —for I know very well Old Jerry couldn't do it. If the moose fails me, I'll turn him loose and go on with my snowshoes. But I do believe, mother, it was just for this that the moose was sent to us."

To Mrs. Carson's deeply religious and somewhat superstitious mind this last suggestion carried such weight that forthwith, in spite of the dreadful menace of the wolves, her opposition vanished. It was "a sign," as she would have called it. But Alec Ross looked so amazed that it was necessary to tell him the whole story while he drank his tea. He was full of misgivings; but he saw that it was useless to try to dissuade the resolute girl. So assuming a confidence which he was very far from feeling he cheerfully pledged himself to meet her next morning at Crimmins's. Then, pulling his cap far down over his ears, he slipped his feet into the thongs of his snowshoes and went off with the long, swinging stride of the practised snowshoer.

"He ain't no lumberman," said Mrs. Carson, eyeing him critically as he went, "but I reckon he knows what he's about." And Amanda, who was pulling on an extra pair of thick woollen stockings, agreed with her.

CHAPTER III

AMANDA was quite right about the moose. He had been thoroughly broken to harness. It was evident that he had been taken as a very young calf and brought up as a pet on some far backwoods farm. He was docility itself, and plainly loved to be handled. But as he had not been trained to take the bit Amanda had to drive him with reins attached to a halter. She found the reins of little use, however, for the great beast responded to the commands "Haw," "Gee," "Whoa," "G'long," "Git-up," like a well-trained and willing ox, but far more sensitively than any ox had ever the wit to do.

Sitting low in the sturdy pung with a hot brick at her feet, warmly clad, well bundled in old-fashioned buffalo robes, her hands double-mittened and her face shining rosy from its encircling folds of a white woollen scarf, Amanda found herself enjoying her journey in spite of her anxieties and her sad errand. She was exhilarated beyond words by her easy control of this novel and imposing steed. With his enormous, spreading hoofs, which formed a species of snowshoe, partly

bearing him up, with his vast strength of shoulder and singular length of leg, the moose took her through depths of drift where a horse would have hopelessly foundered. He forged ahead not fast but steadily, and the pung, on its low runners and wide shoes, rode fairly high in the snow.

Of the wolves she saw never a sign; and so, without event, by the middle of the afternoon she came to Crimmins's wide clearing.

She found the sick woman half delirious with pain, fever and anxiety, the child whimpering with terror, the bent old man muttering to himself as he gropingly fed the fire with the abundant wood which Alec Ross had stored behind the stove. The situation was unspeakably pitiful, and Amanda thanked Heaven that she had been resolute to come. Her coming, indeed, seemed to work an instant miracle, as the child's fears were soothed, the sick woman's terrible anxiety relaxed, and the old man felt once more free to doze in his big chair. There was so much to be done that for hours Amanda had no time to think. Not till late that night, with the child asleep in his trundle-bed, and the old man vanished to his tiny cupboard room,

was she able to sit down and rest. Only then did she begin to realize how exhausted she was.

She found an old magazine on a shelf in the corner and turned over the pages. But she could not read, with the sick woman's painful breathing loud in her ears. She found, though she did not realize it, that the only thing that could divert her attention from the sound was to think about the man who had so unexpectedly launched her on this errand. She pictured to herself his kind and strong young face, his courtesy, his unselfishness, his helpfulness, the grace and force of his figure as he swung off across the snow from her mother's door. A pang seized her as she thought of him, perhaps trailed by wolves, perhaps in a running fight with them, before he could reach the Settlement. But this thought she threw off with scorn. The slinking brutes would never dare actually to attack him. Then she smiled to herself, a smile of indulgent tenderness, as she recalled the evidences which she had found of his kindly but bungling efforts in the sick-room. Yet he had not done so badly after all, for a man, she thought.

The clock began to strike for midnight. In a few seconds it would be Christmas Eve. She wondered if she would be home before her father arrived. She hoped so, passionately. She did not like to think of his big, disappointed face if she were not there to greet him—of his desperate anxiety over her rash expedition. At last she felt her eyelids irresistibly drooping and she sprang to her feet. She must not fall asleep. She went over to the bed and found the patient less restless, her breathing apparently eased by the hot poultices of flaxseed in which Amanda had lavishly enveloped her chest. Amanda did not know much about sickness, but she knew enough to feel gratified when she found that the patient's racing pulse had grown less threadlike and uneven.

And now for hours the fight to keep awake. It occupied all her attention. She had never known that hours could be so interminable. She dared not sit down for more than a moment at a time. And often she thought the clock must have stopped, so slowly crawled the hands. But the night did pass, and just on the bitter edge of dawn came the sound of bells. The doctor and Ross had

arrived, bringing with them a nurse from the Settlement.

Amanda heard the doctor pronounce that her nursing and her flaxseed poultices had probably saved the day—that Mrs. Crimmins would probably pull through. She caught the look of immeasurable admiration in Alec Ross's eyes. Then, curling herself up happily like a child in the old man's big chair, she went fast asleep.

After the long strain which she had been under it was midday and past before Amanda was fit to set out for home. Alec Ross, whose muscles seemed to be of steel, was about returning to the Settlement, and Amanda, with a trepidation which made her angry at herself, offered him a seat in the pung. He accepted eagerly—but with a quizzical proviso that she should not ask him to drive.

"I've no great idea of myself as a Hagenbeck!" he apologized.

"Don't think for a moment I'd let you drive this dear beast!" retorted Amanda with decision. "He seems to know just what I want him to do. I don't believe he'd be quite pleased to have any one drive him but me."

"He is a beast of sense. I entirely agree with him," said the young man as he tucked the wraps carefully about her before taking his seat.

Amanda's small nose went up in the air with a mixture of doubt and defiance. She was not quite sure whether he was quizzing her or not. Perhaps, even, he was making fun of her moose—which would have been unforgivably stupid of him. She was annoyed and disappointed. But as her attention was occupied with the start he never noticed her ill humour. He began to talk, gaily and interestingly. And he was so obviously, boyishly happy over the situation that Amanda felt speedily convicted of injustice and set herself to make up to him for the wrong of which he was so unaware. In such a mood, with her beauty, her sparkle, her childlike confidence and frank audacities, she was dangerously intoxicating; and Alec Ross felt her going rapidly to his head. The better to keep a grip on himself he became grave and quiet. But as Amanda saw from a side glance at his face that he was in no way discontented, his quietness by no means damped her spirits. She told herself, with

conviction, that she was "having a lovely time."

The moose, meanwhile, went faithfully. But it was slow travelling through the depths of broken drift. The early winter dark closed down before they had covered much more than half the journey. This was of no consequence, however, for the sky was full of stars so sharply clear that they almost seemed to snap, and the snow spread everywhere a wide, spectral glimmer. With the falling of the dark Amanda fell silent and seemed to give all her attention to the driving. But she was content. As was fitting, nay, essential in such cold, she was allowing herself to sit quite close to her companion, whose silence, somehow, did not seem uncompanionable.

About an hour after dark they came, still silent, to the lonely fork of the roads where, through a stretch of burnt lands, a confusion of tumbled and shrouded trunks, the trail from the Black River Camp joined the main road.

"This is the road father comes by," said Amanda. "I do hope we're ahead of him, so he won't be worried. He doesn't generally come so early as this."

"No," said Alec Ross, "he hasn't gone by yet. No sign of snowshoe tracks along here except mine of yesterday. You'll be in lots of time the way this excellent menagerie of yours travels. But, no! By George, I'm wrong! There is another track—over by mine, on your right."

"Oh, let's hurry!" cried the girl. "We must hurry and try and overtake him. Get up, there, Moose. There's a dear!"

"But it may not be your father's track after all," objected Ross.

"Of course it is! Who else could it be from that direction?" retorted Amanda impatiently.

"You know," Ross reminded her, "the trail from Johnson's runs into the Black River road about a mile back."

"But I just know it's his," began Amanda, "because——"

She stopped short as a shrill sound, half bark, half howl, came from up the Black River trail. It was answered instantly by another in a slightly lower key.

The moose gave a leap forward, then stopped abruptly with a snort.

"It's your friends, the wolves, and not far

off," said Alec Ross. He spoke lightly. But at the same time he slipped his right hand in under his coat till it found the grip of his Colts.

Amanda's face was drawn with distress and indecision. She was in a fever to hurry forward, to overtake her father before he should reach home. But there was something in those sounds which stirred terrible imaginings within her. She could not bear to go on. The thin, hair-raising cries were repeated.

"It sounds to me as if they were at something," she suggested. "What if they had some'one up a tree?"

The picture made by her own suggestion burned itself into her mind with awful clearness.

"Perhaps they *have* something up a tree," agreed Ross. "A grumbling old porcupine, most likely. Much good may it do them!"

"I don't know anything about wolves except what I've read; but I don't believe they're such fools as that," said the girl. And coming to a sudden decision she started to turn the moose. "Won't you please get out and lift the pung around so we won't upset?"

"By George, but you've got the pluck!"

exclaimed the young man, obeying with alacrity. "But will your beast stand for it?"

The beast evidently had no objection, but rather, having unlimited faith in his human protectors, seemed ambitious to get to close quarters with the foe.

As the pung started up the Black River road Amanda said deprecatingly: "I expect I'm an awful fool! But you know it might be—some man! And I just couldn't go home and be happy if I didn't make sure, could I? Could you?"

"I think you are"—he hesitated, while ardent words crowded to his lips, and finally said: "all right."

It was tame enough, but the tone in which he said it made it seem to Amanda a lyric eulogy. In a sort of exaltation she urged the moose forward. For all the thought she had of danger to herself she might have been going to a poultry show.

Just at that moment the wolves gave cry again, several voices commingling and with an unmistakable note of excitement.

"They have got something there, sure enough!" exclaimed Ross. "And they're close ahead—just around that bend."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when across the clamour of the wolves came a shout—a man's voice, dauntless and authoritative.

Amanda's heart stood still. "My God!" she gasped. "It's father!"

CHAPTER IV

THE fact that for the last half dozen miles his steps had been dogged by five wolves did not greatly trouble John Carson. It made him angry, however, and he wished they would get up courage enough to come within reach of his axe. At last he fell to thinking how awkward it might be if anything should happen. And then, just as he was thinking of it, happen it did. The shivered top of a stump, hidden by a film of snow, caught his snowshoe in such a way as to trip him in the full swing of his stride and hurl him headlong to the bottom of a little gulch. As he fell he heard the snap of a breaking snowshoe frame.

The flesh of his nape crawled, expecting the crunch of teeth. He was up again instantly out of the smother, facing the enemy

and dashing the snow from his eyes. But as instantly he sank back, his right leg giving way beneath him.

The wolves had darted forward, but had not quite screwed up their courage to attack him. Three of them stood, with bared fangs, glaring down upon him, green-eyed. A lightning sweep of the axe-blade convinced them that the man was still too dangerous to meddle with, and they shrank back. They knew they could afford to wait. But they did not like waiting. Two or three of them sat back rather disconsolately on their haunches and gave utterance to impatient cries—perhaps trying to summon others of their tribe who would enable them to overwhelm their quarry at once.

A hideous fear went through John Carson's mind that he had broken his leg—that at last, spent with pain and deadened with the creeping frost, he would no longer be able to fight off the cowardly pack. With his heart thumping in his throat he felt searchingly at the place of his hurt. Soon he satisfied himself that there were no bones broken. But it was plain that he had wrenched loose one of the great tendons of the leg. How long,

he wondered, would it take him to struggle home, dragging the helpless limb yard by yard, hour by hour through the drifts and fighting off the wolves, who would grow bolder when they came to realize his plight? He set his jaw doggedly for the battle, freed his feet from the now useless snowshoes and raised himself erect on one leg, using the unbroken snowshoe as a crutch. Could he win through? Well, he would make a great fight for it.

As he stood there, his sinews stretching with heroic wrath, a sudden jangle of sleigh-bells came to his ears. He shouted fiercely. A woman's voice, as well as a man's, answered him. To his astonishment the woman's voice was Amanda's. But his surprise turned to utter bewilderment, when a minute later, around the turn of the road came into view a gigantic moose, ploughing triumphantly through the snow and drawing a loaded pung behind him. The wolves drew back uneasily at this strange apparition. From the pung a shot rang out, and then another, and one of the wolves dropped, kicking voicelessly. The others wheeled and fled for cover, stretching out belly to snow in the frantic haste of their

flight. The next minute the strange equipage came to a stand close before him, the moose snorting and shaking his head as if taking all the credit of the victory.

"Father! father!" cried Amanda in a voice that shook on the edge of hysterical tears, as she leaped from the pung and struggled to his side, "what—what's the matter?"

John Carson's big-chested laugh reassured her.

"It's jest a little h'ist, an' a game leg thereby," said he. "But ye've happened along mighty handy, Sis, you an' your circus. Them brutes had their own notions about doctorin' me, an' as we couldn't agree there was goin' to be trouble."

"Oh, dad!" murmured Amanda. And then, overwhelmed by the thought of what would have happened if she had gone straight on, instead of turning up the Black River road, she sat down in the snow and began to cry.

"There! there! Don't be scared, Honey! pleaded her father anxiously. "It's all over. They're all gone. An' everything's all right."

"I don't think Miss Carson's scared," said

Alec Ross dryly. "She's the bravest woman in the world. But she's a bit overstrained. Come, Miss Carson, if you'll turn your beast around we'll help your father into the pung and get him home as quickly as possible."

The drive home did not seem long to either Alec Ross or Amanda ; nor, for all his suffering, did big John Carson let it appear that it seemed long to him. If his face went white from time to time at the torturing lunges of the pung among the drifts it could not be seen, and his strong voice maintained its cheer. He had much to ask about, much to be told, in order to understand the happy miracle of Amanda's appearance so in the nick of time. When the sound of their bells and voices summoned Mrs. Carson to the door, and in the streaming light she saw her husband being almost lifted from the pung between Amanda and young Ross, she darted out into the snow with a scream. But her terror was forgotten in thankfulness and joy when she heard the story of his rescue.

After supper, when Alec Ross rose to get ready for the long tramp into Brine Settlement, there was vehement protest from both John Carson and his wife.

"You don't quit my house this night, lad," thundered Carson.

"The idee!" snapped Mrs. Carson with cordial heat. "After all you've been through these last two days! If you must git into the Settlement why it'll be time enough to start to-morrow mornin', surely!"

"You would be perfectly crazy to start to-night," said Amanda.

"An' why not stop over with us for Christmas, anyways?" urged John Carson, who could not imagine any place more attractive than this backwoods home of his from which he had to be so much away. "We'll take good care of ye here, an' give ye lots of plum puddin' an' doughnuts—won't we, mother? Take my advice, young man, an' stay right where ye are!"

"But, dad," protested Amanda, "you forget that Mr. Ross may have friends of his own in at the Settlement, so he may not be able to spare us so much of his time."

"If you hain't got any special, particular reason for hurryin' off to-morrow you'd better stay over!" said Mrs. Carson. "We sure want you."

Alec Ross hesitated, boyishly in doubt as

to whether he might allow himself to accept the tempting invitation. His eyes sought Amanda's, but she would not meet them.

"It was just 'for Christmas' I was going in," he answered. Then, rather hurriedly: "I have no reasons half as great for wanting to go to the Settlement as I have for wanting to stay here."

"Then please stay!" said Amanda, getting up quickly from her place by the lamp to hide the flush which she felt mounting to her cheeks.

THE END.

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